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ABSTRACT

Many programs advocated by civic organizations, parents, and education officials are bringing about positive results in the quality of instruction and services for students in New York City. This report describes the complex process of school improvement as it actually occurred in 10 schools. Members of the Educational Priorities Panel interviewed principals, teachers, and parents at six elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools that had been removed from the state's list of low-performing schools. All of these schools serve a high proportion of poor children, and some serve communities with high numbers of recent immigrants. There was one startlingly common pattern among the schools. The principals and their staff members had given their primary attention to solving the problem of low student achievement, and all other strategies emerged from this central focus. The common pattern included a capable principal and a strong school planning committee that focused on developing new instructional strategies. Based on this evaluation of successful schools, recommendations are made for instructional improvement. Case studies of the individual schools are attached, and an appendix contains methodological notes and additional information about the reform process. (Contains 12 tables.) (SLD)

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GETTING OFF THE LIST

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN NEW YORK CITY

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GETTING OFF THE LIST

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN NEW YORK CITY

EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES PANEL

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November 1996

PROLOGUE

Improving student academic achievement must become the central mission of the school system at all levels of its functioning.

No one could imagine a discussion of the performance of the city's police department without reference to crime statistics, yet discussions of the city's school system are strangely devoid of context. Supporters of the school system champion efforts to fix deteriorating buildings and end overcrowding by providing more funds for school repairs and construction of new schools. The unstated promise is that given a better physical environment, student academic achievement will improve. Yet, there are hundreds of schools that are functioning at less than capacity with no serious building repair problems, and still their students' academic performance levels are poor. But critics of the school system also avoid the issue of academic performance. They look at school security or the pattern of corruption of notorious community school boards. But if all these problems were corrected, New York City public schools would still not be the first choice for most parents with the means to move to the suburbs or enroll their children in a private school. Nor would employers or colleges be made more confident that high school graduates have attained the basic skills and knowledge to function in the work place or as freshmen.

What is so painfully sad about the lack of focus on improving student achievement is the wealth of talent, energy and commitment that exists among school officials, principals, teachers and other school staff members in New York City. In EPP's 1994 report on new teachers, *Swimming Upstream,* we were surprised to find a high degree of idealism and support for public education, especially among those individuals who were entering teaching as a second career. A large number of respondents explicitly stated that they were directly motivated to enter the teaching profession to raise the expectations and academic performance of low-income children. Too often, however, these motivated teachers enter schools where the expectations of low-income children are limited and where instructional effectiveness is ignored. To counter this negativity, Chancellor Crew released a report this past May, "Debunking the Myth," that highlighted 17 schools with poverty levels of 90% or higher where students scored above the 50th percentile in reading and an additional 30 schools with poverty levels of 90% or higher where students scored above the 50th percentile in math. We applaud the Chancellor's efforts to show that administrators and instructors in many schools serving high-poverty communities are achieving acceptable levels of student academic performance.

The central question is how to change the institutional culture of the public education system so that the vast majority of schools succeed in their instructional mission. This report is a partial answer to this question. Many of the programs long advocated by civic organizations, parents, and education officials -- such as, the identification of low-performing schools, high quality staff development, school planning committees, the infusion of art into the school day, flexible funding and scheduling, and curriculum standards -- are bringing about positive results in the quality of instruction and services for children in New York City. But none of them are magic elixirs. We offer this report in the hopes that a closer look at the complex process of school improvement as it actually occurred in ten schools will help to accelerate the pace of reform.

Acknowledgments: *The Educational Priorities Panel would like to thank the principals and planning committee members of schools we studied and the staff members of the New York State Educational Department and the New York City Board of Education for the time and assistance they granted us in preparing this report. EPP would also like to acknowledge the leadership role that Dr. Adelaide Sanford, member of the NYS Board of Regents, has played at the national, state, and city levels to develop an action agenda to eliminate the existence of schools where children fail to learn.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report represents EPP's findings and recommendations on school improvement based on its analysis of the reports of stakeholders in ten schools on the processes and additional resources that brought about positive changes in their schools, in other words, "what worked."

Because evidence for substantial improvement in low-performing schools has been rare, it is critical that New York's educational community study the schools where real improvements did occur (however modest or impressive), and learn whatever lessons we can learn about "how it can be done." If there ever was a time when resources for education needed to be spent strategically to encourage school improvement, that time is now. The education of New York City's children is clearly at stake in a climate of shrinking budgets and diminishing political support for the education of inner-city children.

If asked the question, *How do you improve a failing school?*", members of the general public, newspaper reporters, legislators, and other public officials would no doubt give a wide variety of opinions. Among the most frequently mentioned answers would be: *hire a new principal, end overcrowding, improve discipline, reduce class size, make building repairs, and buy new textbooks.* Even at meetings of education reformers and activists, an optimistic comment will sometimes be made that *We know what practices work to turn around a failing school -- all we need to do is put them in place.* Can this problem really be solved so easily? Do we know with any certainty what these practices are? What does an "improved" school look like in its day-to-day functioning?

This report is an attempt to go beyond opinion by looking at schools where improvement actually took place. Members of the Educational Priorities Panel, with the assistance of staff and a consultant, interviewed principals, teachers, and parents at ten schools that had been removed from the state's list of low performing schools to learn about the processes and additional resources that brought about positive changes in these schools. While these are only a handful of schools, this small sample represents ten out of a total of thirteen schools in New York City that by 1995 had experienced positive outcomes after five years of State Education Department identification and intervention efforts. (Two schools improved by closing and then reopening with completely new staff. The third school that was not included in this study was judged to still be in need of improvement after the EPP members observed classroom sessions and interviewed school staff.)

All schools studied in this report serve a high proportion of poor children and some serve communities with high numbers of recent immigrants, so many of their students are engaged in learning English. We independently verified that all ten schools, six elementary, two middle schools and two high schools, improved their performance, some substantially. Children who were limited English proficient (LEP) in all these schools, however, did not show gains in their academic achievement and some experienced a decline.

FINDINGS

If there was any shared preconception among EPP members before the site visits began, it was that there would be no simple formula for school improvement. This preconception turned out to be wrong. The formula is so obvious and so simple, it was almost invisible to us at the beginning. By the end of this study, after reviewing and analyzing all the interview responses, we could see that there was one startlingly common pattern among all ten schools: these principals and staff members had given their primary attention to solving the problem of low student achievement. All other strategies emerged from this central focus.

Improvement, for most schools, was not a simple matter of replacing the principal. In our sample of schools, five of the principals were replacing previous principals who had also tried to turn around their schools. In two of the schools, the principals who brought about improvement had been principals of their schools for a substantial period of time, but they implemented new strategies with their staff members to bring about needed change. The story of school improvement conformed to the Hollywood scenario of a "take charge" principal transforming a dismal school environment in just three schools.

How did these principals succeed and how did these schools change? There were striking similarities. Many of the principals we interviewed were hard-driving, entrepreneurial, and charismatic. The characteristic that all of them shared was that they were managers of instruction, not just managers of a building. The common pattern in the schools that "got off the list" was a good working relationship between a capable principal and a strong school planning committee that focused, as a priority, on developing new instructional strategies. Though technical assistance and staff development were critical tools in these schools for improving instruction and the functioning of the school planning committee, the principals stressed that teachers and other staff had to "buy into" change. The most important strategies utilized were:

- Aligning the curriculum across grades and across classes within the same grade;
- Improving the quality of instruction in the classroom;
- Monitoring student performance data to see whether different strategies were working;
- Creating a "student-centered" and "parent-friendly" environment;
- Establishing linkages with outside organizations, corporations, and services;
- Introducing a strong arts program;
- Changing the composition of the teaching staff.

In eight of the ten schools studied, those interviewed cited a dramatic change in the composition of the teaching staff as a critical factor in improving the quality of instruction in the school and in transforming the effectiveness of the planning team. In the other schools with no staff changes, there was a new focus on "feedback" to teachers on whether their students were making academic progress. In all schools, the principals clearly communicated their expectations of classroom teachers to EPP interviewers. Their ability to communicate these expectations so clearly probably contributed significantly to their effectiveness as managers.

Principals differed as to whether their school would have improved without being placed in the state's low-performing school identification program, which most perceived as biased against schools serving high-poverty and high-immigrant communities. On the other hand, planning team members that we interviewed all expressed the opinion that the SURR designation encouraged their school's improvement. They reported that the possibility that the school would be closed created a willingness on the part of the staff to adopt new strategies.

How was school improvement funded? A majority of principals had succeeded in getting a number of grants for their school, but for the most part school improvement was funded through supplementary federal Title 1 and state PCEN funds and extra assistance from districts. EPP found that school improvement can be achieved in a fiscal atmosphere of strained federal, state, and city budgets, as long as these extra funds for school improvement are available and used to improve instructional performance. However, in six of the ten schools that had been significantly affected by the 1995-96 tax-levy budget cuts, the principals reported that the loss of staff and programs had slowed their school improvement efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Because a focus on improving low student achievement was the common pattern in the schools we studied, EPP's recommendations reflect this key finding. Newspaper headlines about overcrowding or incompetent school staff and the claims of elected officials about the need for governance changes tend to imply that if these problems were solved, schools would improve, *ultimately*. These common answers to the question, *How do you improve a failing school?* all have an element of truth to them, but if student academic achievement is not tackled directly these changes will not lead to "improved" schools. Buildings should be in a state of good repair simply because children deserve a decent learning environment. Yet the repair of a leaking roof or the plumbing will not lead to the mastery of mathematics. Nor will a smaller average class size necessarily mean that the school will have a coherent instructional program or that students will develop mastery of subject matter and critical thinking skills. Our recommendations, as outlined below, fall into four broad categories. Although we have provided a condensed version of our recommendations here for the sake of convenience, we urge you to read the completed text of our recommendations beginning on page 36 for a fuller explanation of each recommendation.

A FOCUS ON IMPROVED STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT ALL LEVELS OF POLICY MAKING AND ADMINISTRATION

1. Establish routine, public disclosure and discussion of understandable and meaningful data on the academic progress of students in every school and benchmarks for school improvement by policy-making bodies at all levels of the school system.

2. SED and BOE must define and gather data on schools to more accurately measure school performance.

3. BOE must present a clearer picture of the percentage of students performing at grade level on standardized tests in school report cards and other publicly distributed measures of school and district performance.

4. Student achievement statistics must no longer separately report the performance statistics on general education students and mildly disabled students.

5. Provide more training to all school staff, parent groups, and policy making bodies on understanding school and student performance statistics.

STRENGTHEN AND ENRICH THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM AND STAFF IN ALL SCHOOLS, ESPECIALLY THOSE SERVING HIGH-POVERTY COMMUNITIES

6. Strengthen curricula in all schools and align it across grades and within subject matter.

7. Strengthen teacher training and performance in all schools.

8. Better oversight of principals' performance.

9. Introduce more high quality, school-based art, music, journalism, and literature programs in schools.

10. Require school staff to provide a "student-centered" and "parent-friendly" environment.

11. Strengthen bilingual and ESL programs.

12. Create more collaborations between schools and outside institutions, corporations, community-based organizations, and foundations.

SANCTIONS AND REWARDS

13. Work with the unions that represent principals and teachers to create incentives and rewards for professionals serving high-poverty communities who succeed in bringing their students up to state standards.

14. Total reorganization or closure of schools must remain an ultimate sanction and it must be utilized within a set time period.

15. SED and BOE, jointly or separately, must be empowered to intercede in districts with high numbers of SURR schools.

16. Large numbers of schools must not be identified for corrective action all at one time. Instead, SED and BOE should continue to identify a more manageable number so that the identification of low-performing schools leads to instructional improvement or the total reorganization of schools where performance has not improved significantly.

FUNDING ISSUES

17. Successful programs should have sustained funding through both public and private sources.

18. BOE and SED must monitor schools' and districts' use of Title 1 and PCEN funds for instructional effectiveness.

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I. GETTING OFF THE LIST

INTRODUCTION: WHY WE DID THIS STUDY AND HOW IT WAS CONDUCTED

This report represents EPP's findings and recommendations on school improvement based on its analysis of the reports of staff members in ten schools on the processes and additional resources that brought about positive changes in their schools, in other words, "what worked."

Because evidence for substantial improvement in low-performing schools has been rare, it is critical that New York's educational community study the schools where real improvements did occur (however modest or impressive), and learn whatever lessons we can learn about "how it can be done." If there ever was a time when resources for education needed to be spent strategically to encourage school improvement, that time is now. The education of New York City's children is clearly at stake in a climate of shrinking budgets and diminishing political support for the education of inner-city children.

At meetings of education reformers and activists, an optimistic comment will sometimes be made that "We know what practices work to turn around a failing school -- all we need to do is put them in place." Can this problem really be solved so easily? Do we know with any certainty what these practices are? What does an "improved" school look like in its day-to-day functioning?

Another reason for EPP's interest in how schools can improve their performance stems from our coalition's twenty-year commitment to advocating that the maximum resources available to the public school system in New York City go to students in classrooms and that children with the greatest educational needs receive a larger share of resources so that they can reach the academic achievement levels of their peers. Our advocacy is guided by the precept that "all children can learn and attain high standards of performance."

While education officials at all levels of the New York City public education system echo this maxim, the day-to-day reality is that most students in high-poverty communities attend schools where average achievement levels are the lowest in the state. That some elementary schools are allowed to continue to function for decades when more than two thirds of their students test below grade level have led to assertions that there is a practice, if not a policy, of "benign neglect" by the New York City Board of Education.

This practice is not new. Despite a wide-spread notion that at one time there was a "golden age" for public education in New York City, newspaper stories and official documents from any decade show that the standards of performance for schools serving mostly poor children were lower than the average for the city. In the past, however, large numbers of manufacturing and service jobs existed for those with only the most basic skills. This is no longer true today. Sustained efforts to improve the performance of administrators and teachers in schools serving high-poverty neighborhoods are now critical to improving educational and economic opportunities for over one-third of New York City's public school students. Can the practices of administrators and teachers in schools that improved be duplicated throughout the system?

Methodology

The Educational Priorities Panel decided to examine the school-improvement process in detail through a series of case studies in places where successful changes had occurred. For the purposes of this study, this was defined as schools that had been removed from the State Education Department's list of "Schools Under Registration Review," widely known by its acronym, SURR. While the previous State Education Department's school-improvement program had identified three-hundred-and-ninety-three public schools in New York City as "low performing," more than one out of every three schools in the system, the Registration Review process focused on a smaller and more manageable number of schools with low and declining performance on state standards. (See Appendix for history of city and state school-improvement programs and specific performance standards used by each program.) After this study was completed, the state's SURR program was restructured. We describe the changes in Sections V and VI of this report.

From 1989, when the SURR list was initiated, to the spring of 1996, one hundred and fourteen schools had been placed on the list, all but twelve in New York City. By the spring of 1995, a total of thirteen New York City schools had improved their student performance to levels that allowed them to be removed from the SURR list and two New York City SURR schools were closed. By the spring of 1996, an additional eleven schools were removed. So far, 29% of schools, after at least two years on the SURR list, have improved their performance levels sufficiently to be removed.

EPP looked at the thirteen schools that were removed from the list by the spring of 1995. Two of these schools had been closed and completely reorganized with no member of the staff of the original school still in the building. Once the eleven remaining schools had been identified, teams comprised of EPP staff and members of the EPP's Monitoring and Research Committee, accompanied by student "externs" from Yale University, undertook a series of school visits and structured interviews. To permit EPP to make an evaluation, independent from the State Department of Education, that positive changes had occurred in the schools under study, a consultant reviewed current and past New York City Board of Education "School Profile" data to determine the extent to which student performance levels had improved and in what areas. This review also included an analysis of the possibility of significant changes in the demographic characteristics of the student population, such as a drop in student poverty rates or an increase in the proportion of English-speaking students, that could account for improved student performance levels without improvements in school administration, instruction, curriculum, and environment. (See Appendix.)

The validity of some of the statistics for three out of the eleven schools were somewhat questionable. The problem at one school is described in the next paragraph. Another elementary school was officially two elementary schools, so the data was either incomplete and sometimes unavailable. At another school, the principal, when asked, shared his suspicions that student test scores of the annex housed in his building were combined with those of his students.

Seven elementary, two middle schools, and two high schools were visited by an EPP team which spent about one-half day interviewing at each school. At one elementary school, all three staff members interviewed (including the acting principal) stated that the school's major improvement efforts had taken place under the principal when the school had been placed on the SURR list and under the principal who succeeded her when the first principal retired. Even though the school had been removed from the list and EPP's consultant had verified that student performance remained higher than when the school was placed on the list, the staff (all interviewed separately), expressed serious doubts about how well the school was functioning. Observations of some classroom instruction sessions and of

students roaming the halls confirmed their concerns. After all the school visits were completed, EPP asked the Board of Education whether the student standardized test scores of a "mini school" housed in the same school building were included in the averages for the school. The answer was yes. Since those interviewed at the school stated that there was no relationship between the larger school and the "mini school" beyond sharing the building, our assumption is that the "mini" school test scores substantially improved the overall student achievement data for the school. For these reasons, this school was removed from this study of school improvement.

All interviewees were promised that their identities and the identities of their schools would be kept confidential by EPP, though the small number of schools under study and the individual characteristics of the schools would allow knowledgeable people to make accurate guesses as to the schools under study and the individuals interviewed. It must be noted that it was not always possible to speak with a full range of stakeholders while visiting every school. The interviewers met at length with the principal in nine schools using a standard interview guide. In one school, the principal responsible for the school's improvement took another administrative position before the study was begun, so the acting principal was interviewed at the school site and the previous principal was interviewed by phone. In seven schools, the EPP Monitoring Committee was able to speak with a variety of members of the planning team, including other administrators, teachers, a librarian, a guidance counselor, a staff developer and a parent. In the remaining four schools, phone interviews by EPP staff were conducted with a teacher designated by the principal. By the end of the July 1995, interviews had been conducted with at least one school planning team member in each school. In the spring of 1996, the nine principals and the one former principal were sent the case summaries for their review for errors and to ask follow-up questions on funding issues.

Before making school site visits and in order to develop our interview questionnaire, EPP staff and members met with State Education Department staff involved with the SURR program; members of then Chancellor Ramon Cortines' senior staff as well as other New York City Board of Education personnel involved in identifying low performing schools. After the site visits were concluded, a United Federation of Teachers staff member serving as liaison to low-performing schools was also interviewed, and EPP members met again with SED and BOE staff. Since these individuals had the most extensive and direct experience in reviewing low-performing schools, we asked these education officials to identify the common characteristics of schools that had shown significant improvement and what distinguished them from schools still on the SURR list. Individuals in both groups, as well as many of the principals interviewed at the school site, referred to many of the principles of "effective schools" outlined by Ronald Edmonds, who stressed the critical role of the principal in the school as the "instructional leader." (Undoubtedly, these orientation interviews influenced the questions that EPP members asked, what was observed, and the writing of this report.)

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF IMPROVED SCHOOLS

EPP members asked State Education Department and Board of Education staff members with the most extensive experience with low-performing schools whether there were any similarities among schools that managed to "get off the list" that distinguished them from schools that did not. The on-site interviews with school personnel confirmed most of their descriptions of the similarities among these schools:

The major focus of the principal and staff is on academic improvement. Since most low-performing schools have multiple problems, efforts at improvement involve working on attendance, parent participation, building repairs, student discipline, and a host of other pressing issues that contribute to low student achievement. Some school staff make significant headway on one or several fronts, but do not make improvement in instruction a priority. Problem solving in a non-academic area does not result in academic improvement. It merely eliminates a potential barrier to increasing the levels of student achievement, if and only if, the instructional program itself is strengthened. In successful schools, the academic deficiency cited by the State Education Department is tackled by the principal and teachers.

The curriculum is "aligned." In most low-performing schools, teachers work in isolation. Even within one elementary grade or one middle/high school subject, teachers will use different approaches and different concepts, many without regard to state, city, and district curricula frameworks and standards. The result is that when students move to a higher grade or subject level, more likely than not, there will be no continuity. For example, among educators there is an on-going debate about whether phonics or a literature-based approach is the best method of teaching reading. In many low-performing schools, young students bounce back and forth between the two methods. Even in schools using just one reading approach, there is no continuity in the textbook series or consensus among teachers about the level of mastery students should achieve at different grades. New and inexperienced teachers are not informed of the relationship between their course work and standardized tests that are administered to their students, and more experienced teachers often ignore the relationship.

The principal and school staff, especially the teachers, work together on a shared plan of action. The State Education Department (SED) unit, the staff that had the most sustained experience with low-performing schools, recounted a range of examples where the "mix" was wrong: Some hard working, capable, and highly intelligent principals could not get the support of their staffs, and their plans were ignored or actively subverted. In other schools, the staff was highly committed to school improvement, but the principal remained distant and uninvolved. Yet other schools had both key ingredients for school improvement, a capable principal and a dedicated, motivated staff, but no shared vision or plans. In the schools that got off the list, the dynamics between the principal and the staff were good. The SED unit cautioned us against a simplistic assumption of what "good dynamics" meant. In some improved schools, the principals were "top down" managers, but the staff accepted this management style. In yet other schools, the planning team shared leadership with a principal who either encouraged or adjusted well to more collective decision making.

The school is "student centered" and "parent friendly." Both units reported that when schools are first placed on the list, some can be categorized as "out of control," with children roaming the halls, continual classroom disruptions, and high rates of absenteeism, but that a good number of elementary schools that also are placed on the list are

models of order and calm. In the latter groups of schools, staff members are obsessive about controlling student behavior. At both types of schools, once school improvement efforts take hold, the staff begin to tackle a host of problems, from learning to absentee rates, by beginning to see the school environment and its routines from the point of view of the student. The staff also begins to make the school more inviting to parents and to figure out what positive roles they can play in student learning or behavior. EPP site visits and interviews revealed that linkages with outside community based organizations, corporations, and arts programs played a particularly important role in both ending the isolation of the school from the larger community but also in creating a sense of excitement and joyful activities for youth.

Administrators and staff continually track and analyze changes in student achievement and school improvement. From the time that a school is first placed on a list of low-performing schools, the principal and staff find themselves immersed in conversations and memoranda with different levels of the education system acknowledging or challenging the data on how well their students are performing. For many of these administrators and teachers, this is the first time they have devoted a significant portion of their time to reading and understanding their school's student achievement statistics. What characterizes most of the schools that succeed in getting off the list is that the administrators and teachers go beyond proficiency in understanding data. They look to see if the performance of their higher achieving students, those in the highest quartile, can be improved. Or they analyze the progress of their bottom quartile students to what skill areas need to be stressed for the majority of students. In other words, they become academic problem solvers. Even after getting off the list, these administrators and teachers use data to verify that their plans are, as they hoped, succeeding.

The school has a strong arts, music, or literature component. The SED staff stressed that this was a shared characteristic of schools that had been removed from the SURR list and those that were in the process of improving. Healthy skepticism by some members of the EPP Monitoring Committee greeted this assertion. It was good to have these long neglected classes and programs return to some New York City schools after the city's 1975-76 fiscal crisis had wiped out most of these nonacademic classes. But could they really be a significant factor in turning around low-performing schools? The school-site visits gave ample confirmation to even the most skeptical EPP members of the importance of these programs to school improvement efforts.

The amount of effort devoted to school improvement was not a distinguishing characteristic of schools that "got off the list." In the orientation sessions we were told that EPP members would observe that the schools' staff members were in a constant battle with scheduling to find more time for teacher consultations, training, and planning meetings. The school improvement units cautioned that this battle to secure more time, the extra hours of work (much of it uncompensated in a good number of schools), and, in some cases, the "burn-out" of selected staff members characterized not only the schools that succeeded in getting off the list, but, sadly, also many of the schools that do not. In their opinion, school staff in improved schools do not work harder than those that do not improve, but they work better and use additional staff time better. We were fully informed at length that school improvement, whether successful or not, takes an immense amount of effort and time. Yet it was only when EPP members actually began school-site interviews that we fully appreciated the meaning of these predictions. While many reported that after the "initial push" or climatic "breakthrough", the extra hours and the emotional and intellectual stress from participating in planning sessions and mastering new methods of instruction had lessened, the effort needed to continue school improvement remained considerable.

Once the school-site interviews began, it was clear to the EPP Monitoring Committee that two additional characteristics of improved schools listed by both units dealt with more complex issues than were initially understood at the orientation meetings:

Community school district support. Both SED and BOE school improvement units asserted that, with a few notable exceptions, schools that were removed from the SURR list received significant support from district administrators for school improvement efforts. EPP Monitoring Committee members had been forewarned about two schools where tensions existed between the principals and the superintendents, and they were cited as exceptions to the general pattern. And, indeed, a few principals we talked to readily agreed that additional funds, programs, and/or flexibility by community school or high school district superintendents were critical in helping the school turn around. For some principals, " district support" also included an agreement that the district would no longer assign problem students or staff to the school (this practice is called "dumping"). Of course, this district practice had helped contribute to the school's low performance. A much larger number of elementary principals than we expected reported that they had not received enough support or were simply relieved that they had been "left alone." These issues are discussed in greater detail in "Who or What Helped."

The demographic issues. We were told that even after schools had been removed from the SURR list, there was still unhappiness about having been put on the list. The school improvement units described for us their first-hand experience of the highly charged reaction of staff when they learn that their school has been placed on the SURR list, which is akin to a grieving process. First there is denial, then anger, followed by acceptance and ultimately by action. Administrators and teachers begin to admit that their students are not the problem, but "the problem is us." The administrators and teachers where real improvement had taken place, however, "moved beyond feelings of anger" about their school's placement on the SURR list by becoming "problem solvers."

The anger, however, remained strong. Every interview was considerably lengthened by angry, highly emotionally charged recitations by principals of why the SURR program was flawed. The most frequently made argument by school administrators was that the SURR program to identify low-performing schools was inherently "unfair" because it tended to identify schools with large numbers of students who were non English speaking, mostly low-income, and underachieving due to a host of problems, such as unstable families with little educational background. These demographic issues are discussed later in this report.

To some degree, however, the characterization of the SED and central Board of Education units were accurate in their assessment that these administrators and teachers had moved beyond anger to become problem solvers. Those interviewed frequently made statements, such as: "We had to realize that we just had to work harder, that's all." "We realized that we weren't ever going to get a different type of student, so we had to learn how to work with the ones we had." "We're not in District 26 (a middle class community in Queens with the city's highest reading and math scores), we're in District __. We are not fooling ourselves, we are never going to be a school with the highest reading scores. We just want to become the top school in this district. This is an obtainable goal." School-site interviews confirmed to EPP members that administrators and staffs had, indeed, become "problem solvers."

WHY THESE PRINCIPALS SUCCEEDED

One of EPP's key questions when we embarked on this monitoring study is whether most of the schools that had gotten off the SURR list were those where a new principal with a "take charge" attitude that had been instructed by the district to get the school off the list. Popular news stories and movies about heroic principals arriving at a chaotic school environment and "straightening things out" in short order certainly piqued our curiosity in getting an answer to this question. Reality turned out, as usual, to be more complex.

Two principals had been in charge of their schools for a considerable number of years before the school got on the list and were a central part of the school's getting off the list. Of the eight remaining schools, four principals came into the building with a clear mission "to turn the situation around," two of whom were replacing principals who had also tried to turn the school around. Three additional new principals had come to schools where there had been a succession of new principals that had tried to turn the school around and after a year or a few years had not succeeded. Given the history of failed attempts in these schools, it cannot be said that the district or parents held much hope that yet another new principal would be the change agent. Therefore, these principals even though they may have had the objective of school improvement, were not the first ones to have attempted this feat or expressly charged with this mission. One principal had come to a school that, on paper, looked as though it was high performing, but average student test scores in every grade dropped by thirty points under her new administration, a drop so large that it can only be explained by the practice of answer sheet tampering.

If merely placing a "principal with a mission" in a school was how schools turned around, obviously significantly more schools in New York City would have succeeded in being removed from the list. Just as obviously, most newly hired principals hope to improve their schools, and a good number fail to do so. A directive to bring about positive change is not enough to bring it about. How did these specific individual principals, some incumbents, some unlucky new hires, and only a minority specifically "charged" with this specific mission, actually succeed when so many other principals do not?

Creating Structure: Curricula, Staff Development, Planning and Self-Assessment

In all these schools, the "before" story is similar in one respect no matter how different in the particulars: there had been a fragmentation of instructional approaches to reading, math, science and any number of other subject areas. Teachers, largely left in isolation to develop their own survival strategies, chose their textbooks without regard to the textbooks used by other teachers in their grade or subject area or by teachers in higher and lower grades. The curriculum guides of their district or the city's school system had not been given to them or had long been ignored. Even when an elementary school used only one approach to reading, the principal discovered that five different basal textbook series were in use. In a junior high school, the math subjects had been taught by teachers with no background in this area and with no knowledge that a curriculum for math existed. As much as "teaching to the test" is disapproved as a teaching methodology, in a few of these schools the discovery of "closed book" exercises and practice exercises on older versions of tests amounted to significant improvements.

What characterized the principals in these ten schools was that they created order and coherence in the instructional program, or, at the very least, encouraged their planning committees to do so. Curricula and instructional approaches were "aligned" and teachers began communicating with each other. Students were no longer being confused by a

patchwork of different strategies and differences in subject content. Strategies began to bear results simply because they were consistent strategies. Of some interest are the similar comments of two principals that stated that they had to begin with the phonetic approach to reading (basal) rather than a literature-based approach (whole language) because the teachers had to first learn how to implement a structured approach to reading.

The Personality of the Principal: Charismatic, Entrepreneurial, Driven

School principals in New York City are, with a few exceptions, good to excellent communicators. After all, these are individuals who have risen from the ranks of professionals who spend their entire work days communicating. Our expectation, after having met with officials of the State Education Department and the central office of the Board of Education is that we would be interviewing highly capable school administrators. The Monitoring Committee, and the college students that accompanied us, were still unprepared for a series of encounters with so many highly charismatic individuals with such strong personalities in just one series of school-site visits. Of the ten principals we interviewed, only two could be characterized as "laid back" or "calm," but they nevertheless were highly skilled in personal interactions, including how they handled the interview. The rest clearly relished playing a strong leadership role in their school (and, undoubtedly, other areas in their lives). While this Committee perception is highly subjective and impressionistic, it must be noted at the outset of this section that the personality of the principal was in all probability a major factor in the turn around in many of these schools. By and large, EPP members met with and interviewed a series of commanding individuals. The cumulative impact of all these visits underscored the importance of Ronald Edmonds' concept of the principal as the "educational leader."

Another striking similarity among all the principals was their entrepreneurial qualities. For two principals, their quest for resources was limited to continuing negotiations with their districts for additional resources or specific programs. The rest were in a perpetual hunt for collaborations with universities, for city, state, and federal funds and for both small and large grants from private foundations and corporations. The spectrum ranged from discounts on slices of pizza from local pizza parlors to reward the good behavior of students, to an ambitious college scholarship program, to multi-million dollar private and public grants for new whole-school improvement efforts. Essentially, these principals were engaged in "bringing home the bacon" to their teachers and students, which in turn enhanced their leadership status as well as the ability of the planning committee to experiment with new methods of instruction and new programs for students. These extra resources also served as morale boosters for both staff and parents.

However, most of these additional resources and grants were only for a few years, some just for one. Every interview resulted in a list of programs that helped in the school's turnaround, but were no long in existence because of budget cuts or the end of the grant period. In the popular mind, an entrepreneur in the private sector has the possibility of amassing ever more resources. This small group of public sector entrepreneurs, though more successful than some of their peers through a combination of effort and the engaging story of their school's turnaround, gave the impression of being on a grim treadmill. Foundation grants usually were for creating new programs, not for sustaining programs that had been successful. The environment of diminishing education resources in which principals functioned was forcing them to continually scramble to create a new fundable program to replace another just to retain critical staff. In the interviews, a few principals were mournful and even bitter about the demise of programs that had been highly successful in their school but could not be sustained when the grant ended or the funding was decreased or eliminated.

Entirely unexpected was that most of the principals, at one or several points in the interview, interjected their frustration that no matter how much their student achievement levels had risen (and some had risen considerably) and no matter how hard they and their staff worked, they had not yet found an instructional strategy that brought the students up to the level they wanted them to achieve. These unsolicited comments communicated a sense of intense dissatisfaction, not with themselves, their students, or their teachers, but with the current range of instructional strategies: "Something is wrong with everything we're trying." "I am not satisfied that anyone has really found the way to teach kids today." "We are working so hard and we've been working hard for so long a time, you would think that we'd get past just having half our kids at grade level -- I don't know what the answer is, I really don't." While all the principals were pleased and relieved that their school was removed from the SURR list, this was far from a self-satisfied group of principals. Their continuing emotional engagement in the struggle to improve student achievement levels was clearly expressed, and for some, it was intense.

Another Shared Attribute of the Principals: An Ideal Image of the Teacher in the Classroom

Just as good generals pay close attention to their soldiers, it could be said that good principals pay close attention to teachers and see their main job as "managing" teachers, not just instruction in the abstract or all the tasks that go with operating a school. With no exceptions, principals we interviewed explained their school's turnaround as well as what they still were hoping to accomplish by describing the teacher in classroom even though this was never an explicit question in the interview guide. More than two thirds, at some point in the interview, articulated the type of individual they held up as an ideal teacher even though the questions in the interview guide did not require or even lead to this type of discussion. Some felt that teachers had to have "a certain type of charisma," "an aura, a commanding presence," while others saw teachers as "trouble shooters" who should become expert in analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of their students and the strengths and weaknesses in their lesson plans. Another looked at the bilingual program and wanted instructors who were comfortable in both English and Spanish. Yet another felt that his matching of the individual personalities of the teachers to the age level of students had been a factor in school improvement.

Attention to teachers and teaching may explain, to some degree, why the creation of a school "vision statement" or "mission" succeeded in these schools and not in others. Since these were principals who clearly communicated their expectations for teachers in a two to three hour interviews (though unsolicited), their expectations were clearly being communicated to the instructional staff. In a majority of schools, other individuals in the school that were interviewed confirmed that the principal's expectations about teacher professionalism was an important and continuing dynamic in the school's improvement even though this information had not been solicited beyond asking whether "leadership" was a factor in the improvement process.

The School Planning Team: "Buying In"

Virtually all ten schools had strong planning teams made up of teachers, the principal, and other administrators. Some included other personnel, such as paraprofessionals or the custodian, while only three included parents, all of whom had been included under new models of school improvement after the school had been removed from the SURR list. In virtually all interviews the planning team was credited as a major factor in the school's turnaround and as providing continuing direction for the school. What the planning teams accomplished were also nearly universal in our small sample of schools: creating coherence in the instructional program; building morale among staff; developing a

unified vision for the school; developing a schedule of parent involvement activities; changing the methods of instruction; ending the isolation of teachers from one another by initiating communication; building a sense of teamwork among administrators and teachers; developing an ability to analyze student performance in classes and across classes and grades and thus "testing out" strategies; allowing the introduction of innovative concepts and practices; and improving staff attitudes towards students and the larger community.

The universality of strong planning teams and the similarities in what they accomplish belie the one, sharp difference among them that came through in the interviews of principals and other staff members. In three schools, the principal and an individual on the planning team repeatedly characterized the planning team as carrying out the vision and ideas of the principal. In two other schools, the principals had to struggle, in the face of strong resistance by more tradition-bound members of the staff, to get a "real" team established and to initiate programs. In these two schools and the remaining five schools the principal did not see teams primarily as a vehicle to actualize their ideas, but as a collective enterprise which unleashed the intelligence and commitment of other members on the staff. In just one school the planning team was characterized as being strong before the new principal came in, but it is notable that this planning team predated the school's placement on the SURR list.

Since a majority of the schools studied had been on the lists of previous state and city low-performing school programs, a majority had several years of prior experience in creating a school "vision" or "mission" statement and had already followed a mandate to establish a school planning committee, either a "School Improvement Committee," a "School-Based Management/School Decision Making Committee," or a "School-Wide Planning Committee" for Title I funding. By and large, these experiments with crafting a vision or planning meetings were treated by the staff as an empty exercise, yet another top-down directive they had to follow or the latest jargon-laden gimmick that wasted their time. Obviously, if the creation of a vision statement or SBM/SDM were a magic recipe like "a principal with a mission," many more schools would have been removed from the SURR list. So what happened that distinguished these early, unsuccessful attempts at vision and planning from later attempts?

Throughout the interviews, both principals and other members of the planning teams tried to make it clear to EPP members as we asked them to repeatedly rate and prioritize factors leading to school improvement, that the staff had to "buy into" any changes that came about and that the main vehicle for this was the planning team. "Yes, staff development by colleges was important" -- but not if imposed from the outside. The staff had to seek out staff development and the type of staff development it wanted, and this decision was arrived at through the long, and some times tortuous discussions that occurred at the planning meetings. "Yes, scheduling changes were important and so was peer mediation to reduce conflict" -- but not if imposed from the outside. These were decisions that came from the planning meetings. Even in the three schools where the planning team viewed themselves as helping to actualize the vision of the principal, the staff was "buying into" that vision. In turn, the principals of these three schools viewed the planning teams as absolutely necessary to maintain staff morale and a key agent in school improvement.

A Critical Factor: Significant Change in the Instructional Staff in Most Schools and Continual "Feedback" in Those Schools without Staff Changes

In eight out of the ten schools studied, those interviewed cited a dramatic change in the composition of the teaching staff as a critical factor in improving the quality of instruction in the school and in transforming the effectiveness of the planning team. In this project to discover similarities in the limited number of schools that had been removed from the SURR

list, we did not anticipate finding teaching staff changes a common pattern, and this factor should be considered in any larger and more ambitious study. In at least six of the eight schools with significant staff changes, the staff changes were not voluntary. The principal had "forced out" or "ask to leave" certain teachers or asked some teachers to "reevaluate their careers" or replaced one program with another with the objective of eliminating a group of teachers. One principal stated, "I have had no fights with the unions and no problems. The UFT chapter chair has been a doll. She could have created a mess when I wanted to get rid of the deadwood...This school could still be on the SURR list if she wasn't cooperative. Some of the schools that are still on the list have this problem. I didn't have it." Another stated, "I am lucky. The UFT chapter chair is a key member of the planning team. She knew that some of the teachers should not be in a classroom, so she has been cooperative." These comments were similar to others made by both principals and members of the planning team and were not elicited by the interview guide since this factor had not been identified at the beginning of the study and was not in the interview guide.

Not all the staff changes cited as a significant factor in school improvement came about by getting low-performing teachers to leave. One of the characteristics of most low performing schools is that there is a rapid turnover of teaching staff. In more than half the schools, a good number of teachers and some administrators left voluntarily and some had left specifically because of the "early retirement" incentives offered in 1991. Many of the new teachers, some with few credentials or experience, proved to be the innovators and leaders in the planning team because they were less fearful of change and more eager to have staff development at the school. In the larger schools, new administrators were credited with being more capable of leadership. It should be noted, however, that history of battles tends to be written by the victors, not the losers. Some of the stories of school improvement hinted at the prior existence of warring cliques of teachers or strong resistance to the policies of the principal, so a more detailed story told by those that left the school might have included the vetting or resignation of teachers and administrators that held another vision of school improvement but who were highly capable and not "deadwood." The positive goal of achieving a unified vision may, indeed, involve the exodus of competent staff members that do not share the vision.

On the other hand, even though the low performance of those who left these schools cannot be independently verified, the statements of principals and other members of the planning team, if taken at face value, are at least an indication that changing the quality of instruction of a school may involve some change in the instructors, not just the principal. The flexibility of union representatives and their support in getting inadequate teachers to leave the school was cited time and time again as a critical factor in school improvement. It should be noted that the two schools where the respondents reported no significant staff changes were also the two schools with the most highly developed, on-going system of analyzing instructional effectiveness. In one elementary school, the students are tested at the end of each lesson plan unit through the computer driven Comprehensive Instructional Management System (CIMS) to see if the students had learned the major concepts in the lesson plan unit. The principal credited this system for making some teachers understand that the lesson plans they had been using for years were not as effective as they had assumed. In the high school with few staff changes, every new instructional initiative was tested, with hard data presented at the planning meetings to see whether or not the new initiative was improving the students' performance on tests. This school had experimented with and ultimately rejected more approaches than most schools in the study. Thus, in all of the schools that got off the SURR list, management of teachers and instruction was a major dynamic in the initial and continued improvement of the school, even when "management" consisted largely of developing systems for self-assessment by teachers.

HOW THESE SCHOOLS CHANGED

One of the objectives of this study was to find out what "improved" schools look like in their day-to-day functioning. These ten schools got "off the list" because student test scores and attendance improved. But what else changed? And were there any common patterns to these changes? A word of caution is needed here. Too often the results of school improvement have been interpreted as causal agents. Any number of the positive changes described in the following pages have been instituted by schools that did not get off the list and where student academic performance levels were not raised. Nor were all the improvements universally present in all ten schools that we visited, except for better problem solving skills of principals and planning team members. What distinguished these schools is that all these changes were made in order to improve student achievement. Given this important context, there were striking similarities in how these schools changed in their day-to-day operations.

The Third Eye -- A Student-Centered Approach to Change

Once school improvement efforts take hold, planning teams begin to tackle a host of problems, from learning to absentee rates, by beginning to see the school environment and its routines from the point of view of an eight-year old or an eighteen-year old (depending on their student body). If not all-determining in the final staff decisions that are made, this new-found capability of intellectually and emotionally imagining themselves as students gives them a new perspective on what programs should be introduced and what procedures might work to make the school day more orderly and interesting. In contrast, in some schools where limited improvement takes place, school staff may be very caring and concerned about students, but, by and large, most of the staff does not develop empathy, the capability of perceiving their school from a student's point of view. As one Board of Education staff member observed, "It's not something you can really mandate. You just see them developing this sensitivity over time." In other words, as the staff begin to see themselves and their school from the point of view of the student, they begin to develop a third eye.

EPP Monitoring Committee members with experience in conducting school-site visits have interviewed staff at high-performing schools where little student empathy was revealed in staff answers, so staff empathy is not necessarily a prerequisite for high student achievement. It may, however, play an important role in raising levels of student achievement. The frequency with which principals and planning team members in these former SURR schools mentioned students and explained their decisions on the basis of students may be explained by the fact that the SURR status forced them to make a much larger number of changes than most schools undergo and had also made them more analytical about the results of their changes. An unanticipated finding of the Monitoring Committee was that the most visible product of this staff sensitivity to students was the introduction of a very scarce commodity in many New York City schools, even those that are very high achieving -- "fun." Pleasurable activities in the school day came up several times when kindergarten teachers talked about the introduction of little carpeted areas, when principals talked about the greenhouse, the "museum," sports reporting in the school newsletter, team sports, and the after-school program that taught students how to play West Indian steel drums. In many of these schools, the disciplinary code was supplemented by new programs to give positive recognition to students who showed up each day and who were models of good behavior. In short, changing student morale, not just "attitudes," became an objective and part of the school practice.

Similarities in Changes of School Environment

Virtually all schools visited reported that their planning teams had created a calendar of events and activities. The universality of a calendar and also the "vision" statement can be explained by the fact that the State Education Department's school improvement staff stressed these two activities when providing technical assistance to the planning teams. There were also these three significant similarities:

Linkages with Outside Organizations In nine out of the ten schools described in this report, principals worked hard to bring in as many outside programs as possible through establishing collaborations with corporations, volunteer groups, universities and colleges, community based organizations, and service organizations. As the former principal of PS 1600 stated, "I worked towards a Community School concept. The school was so dead, so isolated. I was an experienced administrator, but I was frightened that I couldn't meet the needs of the children. So, I decided to invite every one into the building. I nurtured associations." This principal described a massive infusion of programs, including bringing in one artist to work with students in painting tiles. The principals of the high schools had their students work on building rehabilitation projects and to shadow corporate volunteers during their work day to expose their students to employment situations. Peer mediation and mental health organizations were brought into schools to solve disciplinary problems and to assist counselors. Outside arts organizations and community-based organizations, in particular, played a prominent role in school improvement, particularly in creating a sense of adventure for students and as a means of relating to parents. Doubtless too, these linkages built the morale of the staff and created a sense of change for them.

Music, Visual Art, Literature, and Sports Reporting In eight of the ten schools visited the arts were such a strong program component that they stood out in comparison to most other schools. Their vibrancy was also notable. Where the emphasis was on the visual arts, the hall bulletin boards and classroom decorations were extraordinary. In one school, large banners were stretched across the entry ways to hallways. In another, the children had made full-sized cut outs of themselves on paper and then added individual touches to their paper replicas. The finished display in the hallway looked like a march of twenty-four, three-foot tall gingerbread people, many with caps, book bags, and earrings. In another school, a classroom had been transformed into a green leafed thatched hut. The music program that three out of the six elementary schools had was only observed in one school, which stressed opera. But the sight of young children joyously singing a Verdi tune with all the lung power nine-year olds could command was a unique and captivating experience. It was a also a startling revelation that most school choruses pick pretty tame music. Here was EPP members' first encounter with "power" singing. In the school which stressed literature and held hallway plays, the library was an integral part of all classroom work as well as the key to parent outreach and seminars. The school that encouraged its students to write sports commentary (with some columnists ending with a hint of anguish and concern about the fate of certain basketball and baseball teams) published a regular school newspaper, which also featured poems. The school with the most developed integration of the arts was influenced heavily by the theory of "Multiple Intelligences," but by and large in all eight schools these programs were not "add-ons" or treated merely as classes to be held so as to give regular teachers their forty five minutes of preparation time. While we have described these programs as part of the change in environment, the arts could just as justifiably been put into the prior section on how principals and planning teams tackled the problem of low student achievement. The arts, at least in these schools, were a strategy for improving learning.

Scheduling As could be expected, the middle schools and high schools paid the greatest attention to the scheduling of classroom time. All four schools had created blocks of time, especially for mathematics instruction and math lab, that allowed more "time on task" for students that ranged from fifty-five minutes to blocks of three hours at least twice a week. What was particularly impressive was that these scheduling changes had taken place before 1994, when many school adopted more flexible scheduling to accommodate higher math and science requirements. Planning team members in the high schools and one elementary school praised their principals' ability to think creatively about the schedule so that there could be more time for committee meetings and teacher planning. It should be noted that some of the elementary principals expressed frustration that their ability to intensify staff development was hampered by the cost considerations of having to hire substitutes to replace teachers who might want to meet together during some portion of the school day. In other words, scheduling staff development for an after-school time period could be done only to a limited extent. Another principal imposed a lunch schedule so that teachers in closely related grade levels would have time together on a regular basis. But in general, the EPP Monitoring Committee found that in all these formerly low-performing schools, the principal and the planning committee were conscious that the traditional school day should be altered to maximize student achievement and staff development and communication. As in most schools, there was also the awareness that the schedule should create an orderly and predictable day for students. For a minority of the schools we studied that were characterized as "chaotic" when they were placed on the SURR list, an orderly and predictable school day was an achievement. For the rest, the challenge was to understand that their orderly and predictable school schedules were not producing acceptable levels of student achievement.

Mixed Patterns in Changes of the School Environment

No two schools are ever alike, even in this limited sample of schools. Some faced different challenges. Some faced similar challenges, but their responses and their success varied due to different approaches and different levels of resources (in this study, due mostly to size of the student body or the success and aggressiveness of the principal in securing private and public grants). Most important of all, while all ten schools improved student achievement levels and the school environment, not all problems were solved. Here are the significant distinctions:

Building Repairs Largely because it features prominently in popular movies about heroic principals entering dilapidated buildings, our assumption was that a good number of the schools that were placed on the SURR list were in a state of disrepair and that the rehabilitation of the buildings would be a major event in the schools' transformations. In three schools we visited, this was the exact scenario. Cleanliness, new paint, and the repair of bathrooms became the visual proof that the school was on the road to improvement. Both principals and planning team members reported that student and staff morale soared. In two other schools, ironically, the physical plant remained a challenge. Our tours in these two buildings included complaints about the heating system (the children had to keep their coats on in the classroom on very cold days), a viewing of cracks, unheated and leaking hallways, bathrooms that should have been renovated, and repair work that was taking a long time to complete. The recitation of complaints made it clear that the two principals were still engaged in a heroic, time-consuming, and frustrating battle to get the building into a state of good repair and comfort for students. In the sixth school, the staff had grown accustomed and resigned to years of endless renovation. The principal stated, "The project will never be finished in my lifetime or in the lifetime of the kids." This on-going renovation was only mentioned as posing yearly problems in the relocation of classes. In another school the major challenge had been to get space for the math lab, but interviews in this and three other schools revealed that the repair of the physical plant had not been a challenge.

Discipline, Guidance, and Peer Conflict Mediation Only three elementary schools reported that the creation of a disciplinary code for student behavior was a significant factor in the improvement of their school. Two elementary schools had guidance counselors, but only one viewed the service as critical in school improvement efforts while the other relied more heavily on community based organizations for student support services. In contrast, schools serving older students viewed guidance as more central to school improvement. In one middle school and the two high schools, guidance services were central to comprehensive strategies to reduce student behavior problems. One high school, in particular, had restructured itself into houses built around guidance and the middle school depended on a combination of peer conflict mediation and the services of a hospital mental health clinic. The other high school had relied much more on its community-based organization and scholarship program to try to turn around its reputation for violence and to try to retain students with few behavior problems. Negotiations with districts to stop student "dumping" was another strategy for several schools. As discussed earlier, staff empathy with students was particularly noticeable in all these ten schools, so the recognition that students need positive role models and, at heart, want to learn and succeeded went way beyond the usual platitudes that their schools are building "self-esteem."

One of the reasons why guidance services was not identified more often as an improvement strategy in the elementary schools was that there were fewer services. Three elementary school principals strongly expressed the need for guidance services, and in another elementary school, large enough to have a full-time guidance counselor, the planning committee wanted another counselor. In these schools, linkages with community based organizations were termed inadequate to meet the needs of identifying and working with troubled children and their parents. Symptoms indicating states of severe psychological depression in some children and fighting among students that resulted in serious injuries, such as broken bones, were the most commonly identified problems. Adequate child and family counseling was a continuing and critical unmet need. Sadly, two schools that had full-time guidance counselors when we made site visits had to accept part-time counselors due to the 1995-96 budget cuts.

Parent Involvement There frequently is a point in a school-site study when it is recognized that one question or several in an interview questionnaire are poorly constructed. The concept of "parent involvement" varied so strikingly from school to school (but never within a school) that we realized that the term had no consistent meaning when applied to school practice as well as school mission. The issue goes beyond the construction of a questionnaire. What is meant by "parent involvement"? In our small sample of ten schools it had four entirely distinct meanings:

> **Parent as Volunteer** In three elementary schools, when asked about parent involvement, the answers were couched in terms of how many and how often parents helped out during the school day. One school had a parent that served as the librarian, another had a host of parents at the beginning of the day, on hallway patrol, in the cafeteria, and at dismissal time. Their presence was credited to the improvement in student behavior and was a clear morale booster for the staff.
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> **Parent as Partner in Teaching** In two elementary schools, all the activities were geared to helping parents learn how to read to their children and how to help their children do their homework. The school with the integrated library program had particular success in getting large numbers of parents to attend early morning and after work workshops and, most important, to attend them consistently. These activities were seen as helping to improve the achievement levels of students.

Parent as Advocate In the two middle schools, parents were viewed as important and even critical in negotiations with their district to get more resources to the schools and in backing up the claims of the principals and planning team. The political sophistication of parents was viewed as a positive asset.

Parent as Clients and Members of the Larger Community In the remainder of the schools, and in particular the high schools to a varying degree, the perception of parents were seen as key to improving the reputation of the school. Workshops (on health, college selection, and for grandparents) as well as social activities (such as going to musical events) and improved communications (letters and phone calls) were credited for reducing hostilities and retaining stable families.

No matter how different each school interpreted parent involvement, it is important to note one common pattern: almost all staff reported that it was limited or nonexistent when the school was first placed on the SURR list, and in virtually all schools, increasing parent involvement was a strategy for school improvement. Planning team members, in particular, frequently mentioned that it was expected and was part of the vision for the school. In every "story" of the schools comeback, the initiation of parent involvement activities figures prominently.

Yet it should also be noted that parent involvement was the one area where both principals and planning team members voiced the most frustration about results not meeting their expectations and the continual effort needed to maintain this activity. Parents became involved, and then they went away and new parents had to be recruited. Unlike student achievement and behavior, where ever-higher standards are attained, those interviewed did not report ever-increasing levels of parent participation. Regardless of these frequent expressions of frustration, there was also a consistent pride among those we interviewed that the staff was engaged in these activities and "doing the right thing" despite the fact that the results had not yet attained the desired level of participation.

A somewhat different dynamic was occurring in three schools that were in the process of being introduced to more comprehensive models of school planning teams that included the participation of parents as full members. Here the attitude was one of embarking on a new experiment in relating to parents and hopeful anticipation that the dynamic would lead to another and higher level of school performance. These were very high hopes. Since the adoption of more comprehensive models of school improvement occurred after the school was removed from the SURR list, yet a fifth concept of parent participation, "the Parent as Planning Team Member" could not properly be classified as a factor in the past improvement of these schools. The eagerness of planning team members to have parents join them, on the other hand, indicated how far these three schools had progressed in their attitudes towards parents and their motivation for reaching out to parents.

INTERVENTION BY HIGHER-LEVEL OFFICIALS: WHO OR WHAT HELPED?

From the onset of this study, EPP did not attempt to assess the effectiveness of the State Education Department's SURR program. But we did want to ascertain whether outside intervention played a role in school improvement. Were "top down" models of school organization helpful? Among the different levels of the education system (state, city, and community school and high school district), which level was perceived as most helpful and what role did they play? And last but not least, did putting the school "on the list" spur positive change?

In most interviews with principals, when it came to questions about the outside intervention of education officials and "who or what" helped the school improve, their answers tended to contradict numerous other answers they had given. The contradictions in many cases can be explained as judgments made from the perspective of school-level personnel, which are often ignored in system-wide judgments of the strengths or weaknesses of particular intervention programs. After all, when a school improves its performance, much of the credit (and most of the work) goes to school-level personnel, not the officials who issued the order to "improve or else." But a system-wide perspective should not be discounted. The "bird's eye" point of view can be just as valid as the "worm's-eye" point of view. What system-wide interventions work and which ones do not? Other issues, however, go beyond a matter of perspective and are indicative of some of the problems in actually implementing directives to improve. There are also, we found, a degree of tension and conflict between different levels of the education system when "accountability" goes beyond rosy rhetoric and becomes a reality.

"We Are Not an SBM/SDM School"

Until the administration of Chancellor Fernandez, school improvement efforts at the city level consisted of programs designed either by the Board of Education or the State Education Department to assist selected "at-risk" pupils, such as students who do not speak English or students whose test scores are in the bottom quartile of test takers. In EPP's 1989 report, *The Fourth "R": Rethinking Remediation in the Elementary Schools*, we found that the inflexibility of these "top-down" programs had eroded flexibility and decision making at the school level and were not leading to increased academic performance by the majority of students in a given school, much less the students targeted for assistance. Instead, there was an obsessive concern with paperwork and procedures to ensure that only students eligible for services were receiving them, with little concern about the effectiveness of those services. What was needed was a program that provided flexibility to use funds to improve the instructional program for all the students in a school and that encouraged school administrators and teachers to make their own decisions about where funds should be spent.

School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making was a major initiative announced by Chancellor Fernandez in 1990 which was ratified by the 1991 collective bargaining agreement with the United Federation of Teachers. Schools had the option of forming planning teams made up of the principal, teachers, other school staff, and parents so long as a majority of the members of the UFT at a school ratified the decision. Schools where 75% of the students were eligible for the free lunch program, and thus defined as poor, had the flexibility of using Title I funds to make school-wide improvements. With a few exceptions, most low-performing schools could opt into SBM/SDM.

As we stated earlier in the report, virtually every school visited had a strong planning team. But in two schools, after lengthy descriptions of the actions of the planning team, the

principals took time to stress that their teachers had, in fact, more than once rejected having an SBM/SDM structure. In these two instances the contradictions were almost comical. Here were two schools where the "team" more than fulfilled the model and the expectations of school-based management and shared decision making, but they were "not" an SBM/SDM school. What these two schools shared in common with the other schools we visited was a more developed concept of school-based management than had been envisioned by the 1991 SBM/SDM initiative. All schools had gone beyond a generic model of shared decision making to a more specific model of the type of decision-making they wanted to attain. In most instances, their models were geared to a philosophy or ideal practice of learning or interaction. Repeatedly throughout the interviews, we were told the "type" of school they were. Here is a list of the models they used to describe their schools: Collaborative Learning, Inclusion School, Cooperative Learning, Multiple Intelligences, Core Knowledge, Comer Model, Effective School, and Accelerated Learning School.

When EPP was making school-site visits, the State Education Department's school improvement unit was initiating a new strategy for school improvement called "Models of Excellence," which offered a variety of different school improvement strategies from which schools still on the SURR list could choose to follow. Though the initiative lasted for only one year and had mixed results, EPP's interviews gave us an understanding of why this "cafeteria-style" strategy was attempted:

- Unlike SBM/SDM which was a top-down, uniform structure imposed on all schools, Models of Excellence provided a range of different school improvement models, thereby allowing school principals and team members to have a choice and to adopt a school improvement strategy more likely to "fit" their school.

- Models of Excellence provided the planning team with a road map for interactions and the goals that should be created by shared decision making. The weakness of the SBM/SDM model was that it created a school planning team, but did not give much direction on what the planning team should do.

- Models of Excellence made school improvement, not just team building, an explicit goal of the planning committee.

Since almost all of the schools we visited had gone beyond SBM/SDM and had evolved a more developed and explicit model of shared decision-making, there is some merit in exposing schools to more comprehensive strategies of school improvement. But it should be noted that two schools had a history of rejecting a top-down model and in other schools the explicit strategy chosen may have been substantially modified, sometimes simply because the resources did not exist to fully implement all components of the model. None of the schools visited had been exposed to the "cafeteria" of choices among Models of Excellence because they were all "off the list" by the time this initiative was implemented.

It is conceivable that a few of these schools, if models of school improvement had been "imposed" on them, even where there was some choice about which model to choose, would have resisted all models. Internal willingness to bring about change was cited by all interviewees as the major dynamic in the schools' turnaround, not the existence of an explicit model for change. In other words, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make the horse drink. A clear, unambiguous directive to improve student achievement levels coupled with an equally clear implication about the consequences for failure to improve, such as closing the school, are possibly more important factors than "choice" among models or more developed models of school improvement. This brings us to the most significant contradiction that occurred in our interviews with school-site personnel.

"This School Would Have Improved Even without the SURR Program"

With a few notable exceptions, the principals asserted that their schools would have improved even if the school had not been placed on the SURR list. As noted earlier in this report, staff members of schools that had gotten off the list were decidedly not past the anger stage. One principal called the State Education Department unit "the Prince of Darkness." Others stated that all the SURR program did was cast blame and create a sense of shame among the school staff that could not be eradicated even after years of steady improvement. One principal stated that the SURR designation "doesn't go away, it will be with me always."

What was particularly striking about the principals' assertions that placement on the SURR list did not lead to school improvement is that, for the most part, they came after statements that the sense of crisis, fears about school closure, and worry about job loss had been the impetus for the staffs to create an effective planning teams. Here is a sampling of verbatim quotes about the impact on staff of the SURR designation:

"It created a fire."

"We were frightened that the school would be closed down."

"It made us internalize change. It was change or not survive."

"Being on the SURR list made the staff more willing to change."

"Being on the list got us more resources and more attention."

"The staff didn't want to be responsible for the closure of the school."

It is notable that, for the most part, in contrast to the principals, planning team members that were interviewed stated that the school would not have improved without the SURR designation and tended to identify getting off the SURR list as the major motivation for staff participation on the planning team. One team member, in particular, in comparing the staff response to an earlier school-improvement program with their response to the SURR program, stated that the creation of the school team and mission statement under CSIP was just a "paper exercise" where the staff resentfully went through the motions of complying with steps outlined by yet another set of "administrators with bright ideas." The fear of school closure under SURR, he reported, allowed the principal to create a crisis atmosphere that motivated teachers to unite, to change, and to take the work of the school planing team seriously.

Obviously, if the threat of closure was all that it took to improve school performance, more than thirteen schools would have been off the SURR list by 1995 and more than an additional eleven schools would have been off by 1996. Nevertheless, the potential of sanctions for remaining on the list seems to have played an important motivating role in the turnaround of the schools that the EPP Monitoring Committee visited. Despite assertions to the contrary, the SURR designation seemed to play a significant role in initiating genuine school improvement efforts on the part of the staff, with the possible exception of the one school where student test results changed dramatically after the arrival of a new principal. But even in this school, "getting off the list" was part of the arsenal of motivational strategies used by the principal to raise the performance levels of teachers and to encourage them to experiment with new methods of instruction.

the high school principals, who are in more direct contact with the central office because the Division for High Schools is part of the central administrative level of the Board of Education, two thirds of the principals stated that the central Board of Education played no role whatsoever in their school's improvement efforts. A school-level perspective was particularly salient in the answer to this question. If a central Board of Education staff member had come to the school to give them technical assistance on Title I program design, SBM/SDM team building or their AIDP program (Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention) or (in one instance) if a central Board of Education staff member had been helpful in identifying grant programs, the central office was judged to have been "helpful," though not to the extent of the SED liaison.

This response was particularly striking because the interview narratives of most schools were filled with the names of programs that had been identified as having helped in the school improvement process that were created or structured by the central Board of Education. Title I school-wide programs which allowed principals to use Title I to hire a guidance counselor or secure staff development, AIDP programs that had paired the school with a community-based program, and peer conflict resolution programs figured prominently in the narratives of school improvement as "helpful." Each of these programs had been designed by the central staff of the Board of Education to provide maximum flexibility to school-level administrators and planning team members. Indeed, until the EPP Monitoring Committee visited these improved schools, EPP as an organization expressed concerns about whether the increased flexibility in the use Title I school-wide program funds had resulted in improved student achievement levels because so few schools showed positive year-to-year student gains. Since in at least half of the schools in this study, the Title I program was identified as contributing to school improvement, EPP began to positively reassess the importance of providing school-site flexibility in Title I funding. Yet, the principals we interviewed did not acknowledge or possibly know that the central office of the Board of Education, under Chancellor Fernandez, had worked to expand school-wide Title I funding and flexibility. Similarly, the principals did not perceive that their linkages with CBO's under the AIDP program were the result of efforts by the administrations of Chancellors Green, Fernandez, and Cortines. In short, "assistance" by the central Board of Education was interpreted as the presence of a staff person in their building or on the phone. The creation or the design of a program by the central staff that proved helpful to their school was not recognized.

The repeated failure of principals to recognize the role the central Board of Education in the design of flexible programs at the school level that had enhanced their local decision making gave the EPP Monitoring Committee an insight into an unanticipated consequence of the new paradigm in education administration. Over a forty-year span of time from the end of World War II until the end of the 1980's, educational systems, like other institutions of our society, had seen a growth of central and mid-level bureaucracies along with an exponential growth of bureaucratic top-down directives largely focusing on procedures, not necessarily results. This cycle ended with the recognition that local initiative had eroded along with effectiveness. The new paradigm, largely borrowed from the business community, provides greater flexibility and decision making at the local level, but much closer attention to results and effectiveness by higher levels of administration. The city's SURR schools, more than most other schools, have been affected by this new paradigm. Because most of them serve high poverty neighborhoods, most of them are recipients of categorical funded programs shaped by the central staff of the Board of Education to enhance and encourage local flexibility and decision making. At the same time, these are also the schools that are being held accountable for results, that is, poor student outcomes. EPP members had assumed, possibly naively, that local school administrators would be appreciative for more flexible decision making, even though it came at the price of more oversight for the results of their decision making. In this small sample of interviews,

however, there was no recognition of the central office's role in providing greater discretion over funds and continuing anger about their being held responsible for student results. "Accountability" is a popular slogan in education reform circles, but its actual implementation means there will be school-based administrators and instructors that do not measure up and this will create anger and conflict. We conclude that it may well be possible that the new paradigm of results-oriented school administration may lead to even higher levels of alienation and tension between different levels of school administration than even under the old bureaucratic, process-focused paradigm. This may well be the price that must be paid for raising student academic performance.

Principals and other staff members may significantly change their perception of the role of the central office in school improvement when the new SURR regulations, adopted by the New York State Regents in July 1996, go into effect during the 1996-7 school year. The New York City Board of Education staff will now be replacing the State Education Department staff as the education officials responsible for providing the technical assistance to SURR schools to try to get them off "the list" within three years. Community school districts will also be given this task. The New York City school district is now also responsible for presenting plans to the State Education Department for schools that remain low-performing after at least three years, called "corrective action" schools. Either a community school district, a high school district, or the Chancellor's staff can "reorganize" a corrective action school (impose limited staff changes, such as the principal and develop a new education plan) or "redesign" these schools (impose staff changes affecting 33% to 50% of staff and develop a new plan). During the 1995-96 school year, nine corrective action schools were transferred from the jurisdiction of community school boards to a newly created "Chancellor's District."

The Role of the District in School Improvement

Once again, the high school principals readily acknowledged the critical role that their high school superintendent played in directing more resources to their school in the forms of categorical program funds, building repairs, and staff development. The two middle school principals also reported significant district assistance. But one of the surprises of this monitoring study was that fewer elementary school principals than anticipated reported that assistance from their community school district had played a critical role in the school's turn around. A few simply stated that their district's major contribution was that "they left me alone." These responses, however, were not direct contradictions of earlier answers but represented a far more direct and more complex relationship between student achievement levels at a school and district administrative practices. In interviews, some districts were held partially responsible for the school's low performance. Several principals reported that a contributing factor in the schools' decline had been the district's "dumping" of problem students and problem teachers into the school. Both overcrowding and the concentration of very low-income students, also factors cited for decline, could have been mitigated by school zoning practices, which are district decisions. Never stated, but implied in the very brief and usually tactful mention of the former principals, was that the district's selection of past principals and the failure to remove them despite ever declining school performance was also a significant factor in placing the school on the SURR list.

The prediction of the school improvement units that we would find that the schools that had been removed from the list benefited from district intervention and support compared to most schools that were still on the list was, to some extent, a much rosier picture than what we encountered in our interviews. Yet, nine out of the ten school principals and planning team members mentioned the importance of additional resources that the district had provided, most notably the provision of funds for textbook purchases and staff development. Another common pattern is that the district was mentioned throughout

The Role of the State Education Department in School Improvement

The common contradiction here is that the state's school improvement staff person was judged as helpful, but the SURR program was not. Seven out of ten principals identified the liaison staff member from the State Education Department's school improvement unit as having played an important role in the school's turn around by providing technical assistance to their planning team. Many of the planning teams' achievements, such as creating a schedule of year's events, analyzing student achievement data, creating congruence in subject areas, and the introduction of music and art programs were assisted by the state SURR liaison. But when asked if the state SURR program had helped, only three were affirmative. A common response was, "The staff person we had was terrific and we couldn't have done what we did without her help, but the program is not that effective." Some stated that their liaison was excellent, but that they had heard that other liaisons were not. What got our attention was that these principals were commending different SED staff persons. Asked if the SED program was a factor in improvement, the majority of responses were not favorable, but the SED staff person was given high marks. Given the continuing anger about the SURR program, it may very well be that no assessment by those subjected to a serious program of accountability for student outcomes will be favorable. After all, bank examiners are not popular among bank officials.

Three principals mentioned that at one point their school was visited by a principal from a school outside of the city, and all three stated that this visit or the relationship that it created with the other principal helped to build their morale. The type of "morale building" that ensued, however, may not have been the intention of the SED's pairing of high-performing schools with low-performing schools. The objective was to have the principals of high-performing schools give the principals of the SURR schools advice or at least another perspective. All three New York City principals stated that the visiting school teams had ended their tours "shaken" and "wide-eyed" about the challenges faced by the New York City school, such as high student mobility, poverty, the numbers of students who were not English speaking, and the student disciplinary problems the school had to handle. One principal continued to get calls from the principal of the visiting team to ask advice about how to handle such problems as students carrying weapons. For these three principals the "pairing" experiment reinforced their perception, shared by several of the other principals that were interviewed, that the State Education Department had a "suburban" or "upstate" perspective and that their school was being evaluated by unfair standards.

Due to significant changes in the SURR program adopted by the NYS Regents in July 1996, State Education Department staff will in the immediate future confine themselves to the identification of SURR schools and to monitoring whether state regulations for school improvement are being followed by local school districts. Local school districts will be in charge of assisting low-performing schools. In this new plan of action, the lines of authority and responsibility have been clearly delineated for state and local education officials. SED staff, freed from providing technical assistance, will now ensure accountability for instructional quality. Local school districts, especially New York City where the bulk of SURR schools are located, are now responsible for raising the performance of schools. Since the State Education Department still retains the authority to place schools on "the list" and to ultimately revoke a school's registration, a considerable amount of anger will still likely be directed at this agency by the principals of schools cited for poor performance.

The Role of the Central Board of Education in School Improvement

City school improvement officials did not fare any better than state education officials in the estimation of the school principals. In fact, they fared considerably worse. Except for

the interview in response to numerous questions, while both state and city school officials were mentioned only in response to a direct question from us. The cumulative impression gained by the EPP Monitoring Committee from interviews is that districts were perceived as critical in the provision of additional resources and thus played a significant role in the principals' and planning teams' ability to initiate new academic programs and student services. In schools that had been the victim of student or staff "dumping," their districts' abandonment of this practice could also be cited as a positive contribution to school improvement. With the new SURR regulations, community school district involvement in school improvement is required from the beginning, unless the school is transferred to the "Chancellor's" district. This change in the SURR program may significantly change the dynamics between community school district officials and SURR school principals. Hopefully, it may also make some community school boards more responsible in their appointment of new principals.

One last note about the relationship of these schools' improvement efforts and district policies and practices. Two principals described how they were able to continue practices that they or the school planning team had initiated despite district policies that prohibited them. Because of the sensitivity of these issues, no further description will be provided other than to say that both schools were situated in districts with a greater tendency to micromanage school practices. In these two instances, district policies were to some extent viewed as providing barriers to continued school improvement, and so they were quietly ignored. In two other schools, also functioning in districts where more limited discretion is provided to principals and planning teams, those interviewed reported that they were complying with the district's policy but cited the policy as limiting their school's potential for raising student achievement levels. Thus, in two thirds of the small sample of elementary schools, a district's directive in an academic area was viewed as "a problem."

DID ALL STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT?

One of the key questions we wanted to answer through our interviews with school staff members and a review of student achievement data was whether only selected groups of students improved their academic performance. In the school-site interviews, principals stated that all students had benefited from improvement. Some principals, though, had targeted specific groups of students for additional assistance. A few developed specialized instructional programs for the lowest-achieving students, while others had tried to retain and enhance the performance of their higher-achieving students. In some schools, the principals stated that they had very little say in the special education classes located in their buildings or knowledge about their achievement rates, so they could not say whether these students benefited from improvements they and the planning team had instituted.

A consultant looked at student achievement data provided by the State Education Department and the Board of Education for these schools to independently verify the principals' statements. No detailed analysis was done for special education students because of the difficulty of securing data on special education achievement, our small sample of schools, and the wide variety of special education programs within these schools (some functioned as part of a school's program, some functioned as part of a district program).

There were other significant problems posed by the data that was available. In three elementary schools the building contained, for a variety of reasons, two schools. The critical question that emerged was "Who really are your students?" The answer could not be verified with certainty by EPP. The data from these three schools contained conflicting information on the numbers of students in the school. In one school, which was visited by the Monitoring Committee but not described in this report as an improved school, the test results of students in the second school that shared the building were combined with the school that had been removed from the list, thereby raising the average student achievement levels of the SURR school. In response to a direct question to a second principal, there was an admission that the second school's test results may have been combined with the other school that shared the building. In the third instance, special education referral rates were high as a proportion of all students in one school. Again, the principal reported that total special education referrals from the two schools were reported as the referral rate of one school. Since more and more schools are sharing the same school building, and some "mini-schools" still remain semi-official entities for a variety of reasons, the complexity of data gathering on the student achievement levels of individual schools has become a more complicated task. The staff at the central office of the Board of Education, the officials responsible for this data gathering, have assured EPP that they have recognized this problem and have improved their ability to develop more accurate school profiles as more and more schools begin to share buildings. Yet, it is interesting to note that over the course of this one year study, the problems with the three schools have not been corrected

EPP's consultant did find that while student achievement levels and other performance indicators significantly improved among all ten schools, the principals' assertions that all students benefited from school improvement was not substantiated for one group of general education students. In three out of the four elementary schools where data was available, the proportion of Limited-English Proficiency (LEP) students meeting the Chancellor's standards for English-language acquisition fell significantly -- even in the two schools where Spanish language classes and instruction had been reduced to encourage more mastery in English. LEP data was not available for the middle schools and one of the high schools, but in the one high school where this information existed, LEP student performance indicators dropped sharply. In fact, with the exception of one school, average test scores

and year-to-year gains of this population declined in all schools studied where this data was available. (See Appendix for more details).

The best method to encourage second-language acquisition remains a challenge for New York City schools as well as school systems across the nation and in other countries with increasing immigration. Despite the controversies, prejudices, and ideology surrounding the debate about whether Bilingual, English-as-a-Second Language, and Immersion programs are effective, the reality is that most children from families where English is not spoken continue to fall significantly behind their peers in academic achievement. These students face a double burden. They are attempting to learn a second language along with mastering their course work. Especially at risk for academic failure are LEP students from low-income families. The schools studied in this report raised the achievement levels of their English speaking students, but non-English students continued to perform at lower levels.

It is interesting to note that many of the principals interviewed remarked that the high percentage of students in their schools that were non-English speakers had contributed to placing the schools on the SURR list and could possibly jeopardize their school's ability to remain off the list. Since seventeen percent of all children in New York City schools are recent immigrants, there is an urgent need for the Board of Education to develop and test a variety of models for language acquisition and to encourage the introduction of the most successful strategies to schools with high immigrant student populations. Failure to meet the challenge of second-language acquisition has serious implications for the over-all academic performance of students in our city. Over the last decade, virtually all the growth in the student population of the New York City public school system has come from the children of new immigrants.

EVALUATING SCHOOL PERFORMANCE MORE FAIRLY: THE DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES

A common complaint of those interviewed for this study was that the SURR program was "unfair." A frequent remark made by both principals and other school staff is that if the school were functioning in a middle class community, the school would not have been placed on "the list" and the school staff would not have to work so hard to raise the academic performance of their students to relatively modest levels of achievement by state standards. Not stated in the interviews was the fact that other schools similarly situated in the high-poverty communities were performing at higher levels, though only a handful were at the state norms of student achievement. It is important to note, however, that there is some validity to the charge that the SURR list largely identifies school serving high-poverty communities, especially those with high numbers of recent immigrants. Almost all principals interviewed expressed the unsolicited opinion that their schools, if improvement efforts did not continue, were at risk of once again being placed on the SURR list. This "demographic" argument about the unfairness of the SURR list focused on four challenges faced by their schools that do not exist in much of the rest of the state outside of New York City:

A Concentration of High-Poverty Students No matter how positive the school's Mission Statement was about how "every child can learn" or about "high expectations for every student," most administrators we interviewed were painfully aware of substantial evidence in numerous research studies of the correlation between a school's student achievement levels and the socio-economic status of the community served by the school. Simply put, schools serving large numbers of children from low-income families tend to have significantly lower student achievement levels. Only a very low percentage of schools serving low-income communities are able to attain achievement levels closer to the norm for a city or state. By both national and state standards, virtually every SURR school in New York City is serving a higher poverty community than the norm. In 1994, of seventy-two SURR schools in New York City, fifty eight had concentrated poverty rates of over 40%, according to table B2 of the State Education Department's *State of Learning*. It should be noted that the awareness of principals that the children their schools serve come from high-poverty families was not used as an explanation in our interviews for why the school was placed on the list. All of the administrators and planing team members interviewed by EPP's Monitoring Committee for this report readily admitted that student achievement levels at their schools had been unacceptably low. But the issue of demographics came up frequently as a reason why the SED program had a built-in bias of identifying schools in largely high-poverty areas and also why their school had such difficulty in raising performance levels despite developing higher expectations for students, teacher professionalism, curriculum standards, and sophisticated assessment capabilities.

A Concentration of Non-English-Speaking Students Those administrators with large numbers of children whose home language was not English expressed the most frequent anger and allegations of unfairness about the SURR list. (This issue is discussed in several sections of this report.) Elementary school principals pointed out that LEP students were exempted from English language tests for two years, so their first exposure to these tests was the third grade, and third grade tests results were one of the performance indicators used for placing schools on the SURR list. It should be noted that the SED eliminated the use of standardized tests in the first and second grades. One principal in particular talked about the length of time it took for second-language acquisition (four to seven years in a quality bilingual program), and stated that a fourth grade or even fifth grade indicator would be fairer. All of the growth in New York City's student population has come from the

enrollment of children of recent immigrants. By March of 1995, the SED reports, one in eight New York City public school students, was a recent immigrant.

High Student Mobility Rates Principals stated that their schools' high rates of mobility meant that as much as a fifth to a third of the students in the third grade were new entrants to the school. By the time the school's third grade students had reached the sixth grade, less than half of the students tested had been attending the school for the past three years. Even a year-to-year analysis of whether students had made at least a year's academic progress would be flawed, they argued, because "the same students" would not be tested. In PS 500, an astonishingly low 58% of students finish a complete year in the school. In the rest of the schools in this study, the average is roughly 70%, still low.

A Concentration of Low-Achieving Students Resulting from the "School Choice" Program The two high schools visited were both affected by the high school "Choice" program instituted over twenty-five years ago by the New York City Board of Education. Once students could attend high school programs outside of their neighborhoods beyond the limited choices of vocational schools, both neighborhood high schools in lower income neighborhoods and vocational high schools had greater difficulty attracting higher achieving students. It is also interesting to note that the two middle schools in this report are situated in districts that emphasize "Choice," and, while the principals report that more students than formerly now list their schools as a first choice, both schools' report cards reveal that few of their students are high scoring on standardized tests.

There are no easy answers to the question of whether measurements of school performance should factor in student demographics. While some schools serving low-income neighborhoods have received national attention because their students are performing at high academic levels, these schools are the exception to the rule. Both anecdotal evidence and well-designed, ambitious and comprehensive studies have shown a strong relationship between low student achievement and poverty, especially concentrations of poverty. This is true even during the "golden age" of the New York City public school system. Student performance levels in the city lagged significantly behind those of the rest of the state, even though per-pupil expenditures were always higher than the state average up until 1984. A February 9, 1930 *New York Times* first-page article reported that New York City students who were graduating from elementary schools and who were entering the secondary schools were given a state-wide test. Only 30% of the pupils passed the arithmetic test, 20% the English test, and only 21% the geography test. Annual Board of Education reports during 1935-36 state that city schools had many more students over age for their grade levels and that the lack of English spoken in many homes was one of the reasons so many students failed to be promoted and took longer to graduate from high school. As late as 1950, the high school drop-out rate for New York City schools was 50%, again far higher than the rest of the state.

It could be argued that bias towards the students' ethnic and religious groups was a factor in low-student achievement from the 1930's to the 1950's in New York City schools and that bias may still be a significant factor today, even though the bias is now directed at African Americans and Latinos. An April 1996 report by ACORN, *Secret Apartheid*, documented this bias in a test they conducted. Parents of color who came to schools to enroll their children were rarely informed of "Gifted and Talented" programs in the schools or allowed to meet a teacher or principal, but white parents sent to the very same schools were frequently given this welcoming treatment. Some parents were even directed to other schools as being more "suitable," the white parents being steered towards higher achieving schools and parents of color steered to lower achieving schools.

Yet studies by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. General Accounting Office find that even within different racial and ethnic groups, students from middle-class communities achieve at significantly higher rates, on average, than students from high-poverty communities. Children receiving "A" grades in elementary schools serving poor communities achieved the same scores on standardized math tests as "D" students in the most affluent schools, according to a January 1994 report from the Office of Research of the U.S. Department of Education entitled "What Do Student Grades Mean? Differences Across Schools." A July 28, 1992 GAO report found that in schools serving high-poverty communities, defined as serving at least one hundred and twenty six poor children, almost half the poor children were low achieving. In schools with less than fifty poor children, less than a third of the poor children were low achieving. It should be noted that all schools studied for this EPP report have far higher numbers of poor children than the GAO study. Even more telling was a finding of a 1993 study by the Office of Policy and Planning of the U.S. Department of Education, "Reinventing Chapter 1" that compared public schools serving the most affluent neighborhoods with those serving the poorest. While only eight percent of students in the lowest-poverty schools were low achieving, over half the students in the highest-poverty schools were low achieving.

Given this positive correlation between student achievement and poverty, for whatever set of complex reasons, any program to identify low-performing schools on the basis of student outcomes will mirror the demographic characteristics of the student populations that schools serve. For example, an earlier SED program to identify low-performing schools identified almost every school in New York City serving predominately low-income children. The criticism that the socio-economic status of students was being measured, not the performance of staff in schools, had some validity. But SED's change in 1989 in its methodology of identifying low-performing schools by declining indicators created a perception of unfairness because schools with constant, but lower levels of performance were not placed on the SURR list. Even with this new methodology, however, the overwhelming majority of schools were situated in high-poverty neighborhoods.

In response to the complaint that the lowest performing schools are not being identified, SED has now returned to the previous methodology but with some recognition of demographic issues. The new regulations now allow local school districts to provide "value added" data, most notably student progress from grade to grade and second language acquisition, to challenge an initial list of low performing schools drawn up by the SED. If the New York City Board of Education can point to certain schools where initially low student performance levels were improved significantly, even though their higher performance levels were still below state standards, these schools could be removed before a final determination is made. SED officials have characterized this proposed change as merely formalizing an already existing dialogue. The New York City Board of Education currently provides "value added" data in an attempt to get the SED to more accurately assess the performance of administrators and teachers serving high-poverty communities.

Permitting a "value added" defense, EPP concurs, is an important step towards a fairer evaluation of staff performance where there is a high concentration of student poverty. If most students are performing below grade level, but most low and middle scoring students are making more than one year's progress academically, the staff should not be characterized as poorly performing. This attempt to recognize demographic factors is preferable to creating lower standards of achievement for schools with a concentration of poverty students. The very best solution, of course, would be to eliminate the gap in average student performance levels between schools serving high-poverty neighborhoods and schools serving largely middle class or affluent neighborhoods. This may involve the eradication of racial or economic bias or the eradication of poverty itself, not likely events in the immediate future, to put it mildly. But reducing this academic performance gap between schools is a

realistic goal for the immediate future. This means that much more attention must be given to schools serving high concentrations of students from low income and immigrant families. As we discuss in the next chapter, the performance gap has grown smaller over the last few decades because of greater investment in poor children's education, most notably federal Title I funds and a better distribution of resources among schools in different states. Money does make a difference.

EPP is fully aware that until the day when demographic differences have negligible impact on student performance, programs that seek to identify low-performing schools will inevitably identify a far higher percentage of schools serving high-poverty neighborhoods. The principals and teachers in these schools will continue to be, unfairly, measured against the performance of school staff in higher income neighborhoods. But the SURR program does not seek to negatively sanction all schools performing below the norm set by schools serving students from middle and high income families, just those furthest from the norm. This is true so long as the recent changes in the SURR program do not mimic the state's previous attempt to label hundreds of New York City schools as low performing, which amounted to little more than a public shaming campaign. The closure or reorganization of schools unable to improve and falling below acceptable levels of student academic achievement, on the other hand, may help to narrow the performance gap between students of different socio-economic communities. Whatever the complex reasons why students in high-poverty schools lag behind their peers in other schools (such as, bias or the role of parents' educational attainment), there are no demographic factors that we find convincing, including high concentrations of students with limited English proficiency, to explain the continued operation of 161 New York City elementary schools where two thirds of students are performing below grade level as measured by standardized reading tests. If anything, the demographic argument for too long has resulted in the toleration of low-functioning principals and teachers and the acceptance of very low levels of student achievement in schools serving high-poverty communities. As we discuss in our recommendations and in the next section, there should be a recognition that students in high-poverty and high-immigrant neighborhoods need additional resources, better performing staff, and greater oversight by school officials to ensure that instructional effectiveness is being achieved.

Note: Three other common complaints about the state's SURR program issues came up repeatedly in our school-site interviews. At the time that this report is being drafted, SED addressed these complaints: 1) Even lower-performing schools were not placed on the list. The SURR program, unlike the previous state program for low-performing schools, looked at schools where key indicators of student achievement were declining for three years. Schools where achievement levels were very low, but not declining, were not placed on the SURR list. 2) .Several principals told us that while the SURR guidelines were clear about how schools got on the list, there were no clear guidelines for removal. As one principal told us, "I didn't know we had really gotten off the list until you called for an appointment, so I am very glad to see you." 3) There was no positive recognition given to the school for having improved. Principals and planning team members were justifiably proud of how they had turned around their schools and of their students' higher achievement levels. Yet no formal ceremony or other form of public recognition marked the occasion of their schools' removal from the list. Amendments adopted by the NYS Board of Regents in July 1996 to Section 100.2 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education change the methodology used to identify low-performing schools. Schools farthest from meeting state standards will be placed on the list, rather than those with merely declining indicators of performance. Another series of changes clearly delineates where progress should be demonstrated so that a school can be removed from the SURR list. In 1996, when eleven more schools were removed from the list, SED made a public announcement about their improved performance. The result was that, in the words of one SED official, these principals were "treated as through they had won the lottery."

FUNDING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

EPP had several funding questions about school improvement. The first is whether it could be done in a fiscal atmosphere of budget cuts and without a massive infusion of new money? We also wanted to know if there were specific funds available to schools for improvement efforts, and if so, what materials and services were purchased with this money. If more funds had been available, would they have made a difference? A related question was whether the 1995-96 budget cuts had hampered the efforts of school staff to raise student achievement levels.

Special federal and state funding programs make school improvement possible.

As we explain later on in this section, on a per-pupil basis the New York City public school system receives $1,090 less than the average school district in the rest of the state. Funds that come to schools from state operating aid and the municipal budget barely maintain class sizes required by the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers' union. In some schools there are not enough funds for supplies, textbooks, and an additional school secretary or assistant principal. Few of the initiatives described by principals and planning team members were funded by these tax levy allocations to schools.

Despite a wide assortment of small grants that purchased additional staff or programs, such as a teacher trainer or an art program, all the schools relied primarily on funds that came to their school from a federal program to provide compensatory education for poor children (Title I) and a state program to provide remedial services to children with low levels of academic performance (Pupils in Need of Compensatory Education). Currently, all schools in New York City serving a school population that is 65.99% poor receive Title I funds, a criterion that most, if not all, SURR schools meet. All schools receive the state PCEN allocation on the basis of the number of academically under-achieving students, which means that all SURR schools receive much higher PCEN allocations than better performing schools. In fact, the school that served the less poor community, PS 400, where the student poverty rate was "only" 62% at the time that it was first placed on the list, and thus was the only school in this report ineligible to receive Title I funds, was able to bring about improvements with just state PCEN funds, though it received higher amounts from this source than most other schools in the community school district and the rest of the schools in our small sample of ten schools. (As of the 1996-97 school year, PS 400 is now eligible to receive Title I funds.)

Until 1989, most of these federal and state funds were used by schools to pull out eligible students from their regular classrooms for remediation sessions where they would be drilled on basic skills of math and reading. EPP's 1989 report, *The Fourth "R": Rethinking Remediation in the Elementary Schools*, questioned the wide practice of having paraprofessionals, rather than teachers, provide these remediation services, often without time for consultation with teachers, and the disruption that these "pull-out" remediation sessions created for the classroom. Another common pattern was for the community districts to utilize a high proportion of these funds for their own district, possibly an indication of patronage practices. EPP urged that more funds be driven to the school to hire teachers and that administrators be allowed to pool federal and state funds and to use them for efforts to improve the whole school.

The good news is that district headcount reductions have curbed some patronage practices and that over the course of six years, federal, state, and city education administrators have consistently worked towards driving more of these funds to the schools

and to allow schools maximum flexibility in the use of these funds for "school-wide" improvement efforts. Five of the nine schools received their Title I allocations under a program pioneered in 1989 that allowed schools with student poverty rates of 75% to receive their funds directly and to have local decision making on how best to use the funds called "School-Wide Project." As of 1995-96 school year, the federal threshold for eligibility for these funds was set at 65% student poverty. Virtually every Title I eligible school in New York City now qualifies for this type of funding. But only slightly over four hundred schools of the seven hundred and nine schools receiving Title I funds in New York City have opted to be in the school-wide program, which requires the submission of a plan developed by principals, teachers and parents as well as the agreement of the district superintendent.

How much money was available for school improvement?

Nine schools received $248,264 to $1.6 million in federal and state funds above their school's per-pupil allocation from the district for general education (school year 1991-92). The range of funding depended on the number of pupils eligible for these funds in their schools and whether their districts used a portion of these funds for district programs. The one school that was eligible for state funds only, received $271,225 in state funds. On a per-pupil basis, the funding came to $1,293 to $2,118 in additional funding for every Title I and PCEN eligible student. Some schools reported receiving less than the amounts listed in district allocation reports of the central Board of Education. The district reported the amount as an allocation to the school, but part of the money was actually used for a district program which was deemed to benefit the school. These issues were not pursued in the interviews with principals because of their reluctance to go into details. EPP conducted a study of how much funds reached the classroom during the 1991-92 school year, *Equity in the Funding of Public and Elementary Schools in New York City*, which provides some data on funds actually at the disposal of school administrators. On the basis of each pupil eligible for Title I and PCEN, the community school districts received anywhere from a low of $1,715 to a high of $3,785, but funds actually allocated to the schools came to $818 to $1,968. EPP was told that funds retained at the district level covered employee fringes, such as health insurance, but we were unable to obtain documentation of this.

Title I and PCEN, for most schools, was not the sole source of funding for school improvement. As reported in the previous sections of this report, most principals also succeeded in getting small grants for their schools, and the two high schools were recipients of a large Attendance Improvement Drop Out Prevention funding. It should also be mentioned that the state's school improvement unit provided technical assistance at no charge to the school. Virtually every school mentioned that their district had provided extra funds for textbooks and most utilized district staff training or training that had been arranged for the school by the district.

What needs to be funded for school improvement?

There was such a variation among schools in the programs, services, and materials that they funded that EPP staff had to summarize the interview material and then ask follow-up questions to get a better picture of common patterns. Title I and PCEN funds, in all these schools, were still used primarily to help students who were falling behind academically. Funds were used to reduce class size, provide remediation in reading and math, hire paraprofessionals, buy computers and books, improve attendance, hire guidance counselors and librarians, and buy supplies and books. We asked principals to tell us what services and materials they purchased with Title I and PCEN, beside direct assistance to students, supported school improvement efforts. With the exception of one principal who refused to

give an opinion, there was consensus among the rest of the principals as to the basic materials and services for school improvement that needed to be funded:

Books All schools upgraded most of textbooks in use in the classroom. In some schools there had been old textbooks or incomplete sets. In many of the schools in this report, efforts to align curriculum or to try new methods of teaching meant that within a few short years the school discarded several sets of textbooks. Several also expanded or began using their libraries again. In short, the investment in new books was quite extensive.

Staff Training While there was a wide diversity in how schools conducted training, all of the principals reported expenditures in this area that were large and for the most part continuing, whether or not it was the school or the school district that was purchasing the training or it was being provided through a collaboration with the United Federation of Teachers sponsored Teacher Training Centers. It was in this area where additional grant money was used extensively either to purchase an on-site trainer from another institution, hire a school teacher trainer, or send teachers for training to another site.

Substitute Teachers These expenditures supported staff training activities. In order for some teachers to attend some off-site training sessions or even, at times, to attend specific training sessions at the school with staff developers, substitutes had to be hired for a certain number of days each year to replace teachers in the classroom beyond those needed for normal coverage.

Per-Session Compensation This was another expenditure that, for the most part, supported either staff training or planning committee activities. While many schools reported that participation in after-school staff development and in school planning teams had been uncompensated, or initially uncompensated, funds were eventually needed to compensate teachers for what amounted to overtime, called "per-session" by the Board of Education. In some other schools, participation in school planning teams and after-school training had initially been compensated, but no longer was for budgetary reasons. Several of the schools had also reorganized the school day, so that students needing remediation or high school students who wanted to take extra courses could do so after school. This required per-session compensation for teachers.

Linkages with outside organizations. Bringing in arts organizations and activities or supporting collaborations around art were one of the more frequent expense items. Peer mediation programs, partnerships with mental health services, and some college and university programs required either additional staffing and coordination to support these services or some matching funds. Even serving as a site for a volunteer tutoring program necessitated fund raising by one school so that volunteers could be transported to the school.

Three principals expanded this list of critical resources for school improvement that needed funding by citing additional classroom materials, computers and technology, and more staff. It should be clarified that for the purposes of this discussion, we have created a distinction between funds used to help students directly and funds used for school improvement, a distinction that is entirely artificial at the school level. In actual practice, the academic achievement of students improve because of both direct assistance and better quality assistance. Yet the majority of schools, especially those not on the SURR list, use Title I and PCEN funds exclusively for direct assistance to students, some still using paraprofessionals, with little investment made in staff development to upgrade the quality of

instruction and remediation or the decision making in the school. The result is not that these funds are "wasted" or "squandered," but that the school's students as a whole do not substantially improve their academic performance. Despite efforts to help individual students, the instructional environment itself remains plagued with a lack of a consistent curriculum, a lack of problem-solving skills and self-assessment by staff, and poor supervision and communication by administrators. Board of Education officials were also critical of the nature and duplication of staff development that they had witnessed in some schools that had not been removed from the SURR list. Their criticism was that instead of hiring more teachers, the principal or superintendent had put three or four school and district staff developers with questionable expertise on the payroll to work with the troubled school with little thought on how all these developers should work together.

Would more money make more of a difference?

This question is always fraught with ideological biases of one sort or another and circular reasoning. Routinely, when the question of whether money matters in education, the question tends to be interpreted as abstractly as possible with little reference to actual funding practices. Another question has to be asked: "Money for what?" The repair and construction of schools, while critically needed in New York City, will not improve the academic performance of students, except marginally in those schools where overcrowding is a problem. The studious avoidance of the question of "Money for what?" marks those critics who point to the budget increases nationally and in New York State that have gone to public education and the lack of significant improvement on such measures as Scholastic Achievement Tests. A national research study sponsored by the Economic Policy Institute and the Metropolitan Life Foundation, *Where's the Money Gone? Changes in the Level and Composition of Education Spending* by Richard Rothstein, published November 14, 1995, and a state study on cost-effectiveness in education commissioned by the State Education Department, *The Allocation of Resources in New York State School Districts: 1979-80 to 1993-94*, by Hamilton Lankford and James Wyckoff, published March 1, 1996, show that the increases in public education spending over the last few decades have gone primarily to special education and a slight increase in teacher salaries over inflation, not into improving the instruction of general education students whose test scores determine student achievement rates.

An ambitious study that tracked rates of student achievement as they relate to family characteristics on a longitudinal basis from 1970 to 1990 was issued by the Rand Institute on Education and Training in December, 1994. *Student Performance and the Changing American Family* found that on the basis of parents' education, family income, family size, and the mother's age at the child's birth, black and Hispanic students made the greatest academic improvements. Gains made by non-Hispanic whites, when family characteristics were fully accounted for, were slight. While there is still a minority-nonminority test score gap, the researchers attribute the narrowing of this gap to public investment policies. What is particularly noteworthy about this study is that the researchers utilized the National Assessment of Education Progress test scores as indicators of student achievement, rather than the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores that are not designed to compare student performance over time because they are not taken by a statistically representative sample of the nation's students. In fact, because these tests exclude non-college bound students, SAT does not capture the group registering the largest gains in scores and is particularly misleading as a measure of the performance of the nation's schools.

Would more money make a difference for all schools?

The more direct question for this report is whether an additional $500,000 to $2 million per school would significantly improve student outcomes in SURR schools. The

answer is a highly qualified yes. Providing these sums to a school with a poorly performing principal, a low-morale staff, a high proportion of poor instructors, all functioning without a strategy or even understanding of curriculum would produce marginal improvements, if any. In a public school system that has tolerated poorly performing schools for too long and tends to monitor schools and districts for compliance with budget and administrative directives rather than instructional effectiveness, there is no assurance that all schools will use these additional funds well. But it is encouraging that twenty-nine percent of schools, after at least two years on the SURR list, and most with no significant additional funds than those received by other high poverty schools, were able to improve their performance enough to be removed from the list. We therefore speculate that if these schools had more resources, they might have made additional gains in student achievement and school improvement. It should be added that schools that are not on the list and performing at equally or higher levels than the improved schools, would also be able to benefit from increased investment in general education instruction.

When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was up for reauthorization in 1994, EPP along with many other education reform organizations, urged Congress to change Title I policy so that funds within school districts would be allocated to schools on the basis of the number of children from low-income families, not on the basis of low achievement, though there is a strong relationship between the two. Our reasoning was that schools with low-achievement rates were given a perverse incentive to remain low achieving because, if student performance increased these schools would lose money. And, indeed, several of the schools in this study lost a portion of their Title I money just for this reason, though district funding practices helped soften the blow. Because these were sensitive issues, the principals would not give more details. Unfortunately, state PCEN funds are still distributed in New York City on the basis of low student achievement. However, there has been a history in some community school districts of redirecting PCEN money, regardless of state and city guidelines, to compensate schools that are ineligible for Title I funds and that have much higher student achievement rates. This practice is continuing in the 1996-97 school year. In some districts, this misdirection of funds tends to reduce allocations to high-minority schools and increase allocations to low-minority schools. In other districts, with little distinction among schools as to student characteristics, community school board members have explained this practice by stating that most of the high-poverty schools had such incompetent principals that they did not want to see the money "wasted."

The Educational Priorities Panel, faced with a decision in 1994 on whether to endorse a legislative proposal to provide a significant amount of state funds to all SURR schools, whether or not they were in the process of improvement, came to a somewhat similar position. We came to the conclusion that a large investment in all SURR schools would produce a perverse reward for poor performance and that there was no guarantee that a majority of poorly performing schools would use the additional funds well. Though both examples involve the issue of whether many low-performing schools are capable of utilizing additional funds effectively, an important distinction, however, needs to made here between objecting to rewarding schools for poor performance and denying schools the allocations that are due to them on the basis of a state policy of providing funds to schools with large numbers of students performing below state standards. We would suggest that both the state and the city should begin to monitor community school districts and schools on the basis of whether both Title I and state PCEN funds are being effectively used to improve the academic achievement levels of students in the lowest-performing schools. More attention to effectiveness in the use of this money would inspire more compliance by some community school districts in ensuring that funds are fully directed to schools on the basis of their eligibility. As it stands now, there are provisions in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act that require the state to verify that students are making academic progress under Title I. The state and the city are now developing a Title I School Improvement

Accountability System to identify schools where students are not making adequate progress. An open question is what consequences will follow from a school's designation as "in need of Title I School Improvement"? The lack of previous monitoring for remedial effectiveness in the use of Title I and PCEN funds has helped to create a vicious cycle whereby schools with high-poverty populations are perceived as "squandering" the extra funding they receive, and so in some districts these funds are directed elsewhere, and high-poverty schools do not get the full funding they need. If there was greater oversight over instructional quality in schools and earlier intervention in failing schools, there would be, hopefully, better compliance with allocation policies and more resources would be directed to schools needing these additional resources.

Most of the schools in our study made limited gains in student performance because their funding for school improvement and instruction was limited by the constraints of underfunding of general education in New York City public schools. Compared to the average for the rest of the state, on a per-pupil basis New York City public school students receive $1,090 less (Table 10 of *Analysis of School Finance* issued by the State Education Department in October 1995). For an average New York City classroom of twenty-four students this means $26,160 less in resources than an average classroom outside the city in the 1993-94 year. The results are larger class sizes, fewer books, fewer art, music and other programs, less sports and other after-school activities, and fewer computers in comparison with the average for the rest of the state. Yet New York City educates the highest proportion of children living in poverty and whose native language is not English. In our sample of ten schools where student achievement had improved, with two exceptions, the resulting student achievement levels still fell below state standards. More resources, in the hands of capable administrators and teachers, could bring achievement levels up further. This brings us to a related question.

Have recent budget cuts had any affect on school improvement?

The EPP site visits and interviews took place in the spring of 1995, before the dramatic budget reductions of the 1995-96 school year. In our follow-up phone survey, we had the opportunity to ask the nine current principals whether the city's $752 million in budget cuts had significantly impacted their schools and whether this had affected their improvement efforts. Five principals answered that the city budget cut had a negligible effect on their school. These same five principals, not surprisingly, in answer to the question "Have the budget cuts affected school improvement?" stated that there had been none or only a slight impact. The four principals that reported losses of personnel and programs, on the other hand, answered in very strong terms, from "it has slowed us down" to "absolutely!" As we discussed in the section on environment, there was an unmet need for counseling in the elementary schools. But two of the elementary schools that had full-time counselors went to a part-time counselors. Class sizes increased because of the loss of teaching staff, and one school had to form "bridge classes," made up of students in two grades. Saddest of all was the impact on the high schools that had to abandon advanced placement courses for their brightest students and cut into sports. The one high school that had been very proud of its music program, which was believed to have helped turn around the school, had to end the program in order to preserve its math and English writing laboratories. The principal stated that he had not been proud of his actions, but there were no other budget options. This question on the impact of budget cuts is interestingly another variation of the question of whether money makes a difference for school improvement. For those principals for whom the question remained essentially an abstract proposition, the relationship of funds to improvement was questionable. For those principals directly affected by budget cuts the answer to the question was tangible and they perceived a direct relationship between funds and improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What can be learned from the small sample of ten schools that are the subject of this monitoring report? The most important lesson is that school improvement is possible, though not as easily achievable as some may believe. In an era when "top down" administrative directives are rejected and local school initiatives are encouraged, what policies and practices at the system-wide level would lead to higher levels of performance by public schools in New York City? The Educational Priorities Panel ends this report with recommendations in four areas. But, in essence, we end this report with one major recommendation: **Improving low student academic achievement must become the central mission of the school system at all levels of its functioning.**

What follows are prescriptions for the implementation of consistent practices, most of which require no changes in current laws or regulations. At the time that this report is being written, various proposals have been introduced in the state legislature proposing significant changes in the structure of New York City's public education system. Given the uncertainty of whether governance reform will become a reality and whether the "reform" will amount to much more than a reconfiguration of power and lucrative contracting authority among city officials, most of our recommendations do not depend on enactment of law.

A FOCUS ON IMPROVED STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AT ALL LEVELS OF POLICY MAKING AND ADMINISTRATION

Like many of the formerly low-performing schools that EPP members visited where the former principals were so consumed with managing their buildings that they were not managing instruction, policy makers at the central and district levels are so busy managing multi-million dollar systems that they are not providing policy oversight over instructional quality. The ironies are that the education system is awash with data and statistics about student achievement levels and that significant resources are devoted to their collection and dissemination. But as school principals and planning team members admitted to us in interviews for this report, the voluminous data most often remains largely unexamined. The reason for this is that the information has few consequences.

The occasional media attention to student outcomes has been largely irrelevant to the careers of school officials. Most press coverage of student achievement is devoted to the ranking of elementary schools on the basis of student reading and math test scores and high school dropout statistics. Because it is limited, partial, and does not provide any follow-up reporting on changes, press coverage does not in and of itself provide the incentive that more detailed and regular reporting at meetings of deliberative bodies would provoke among administrators. School report cards, which are currently distributed to parents, lack meaningful information on the academic achievement levels of the school's students. And once the report cards are issued to parents, there are no public forums at the school or district levels for discussing either the report card or strategies for improving the school's performance levels. <u>While school report cards should be improved and their distribution continue, public disclosure of data is not enough.</u> Administrators and policy makers must be charged with taking action on the basis of meaningful data on student achievement.

1. Establish routine, public disclosure and discussion of understandable and meaningful data on the academic progress of students in every school and benchmarks for school improvement by policy-making bodies at all levels of the school system. Any review of the deliberations and actions of the members of the Board of Education and the members of most community schools districts will show that the agendas are filled with approvals of contracts, promotions and salary increases, the results of

disciplinary proceedings, reviews of budget items, and the adoption of personnel or school policies. A presentation and discussion of student academic achievement levels by individual schools are relatively rare occurrences. EPP urges the Board of Education, community school districts, and schools to hold public hearings and meetings to present clear and meaningful data on current levels of performance and annual goals for improvement by districts and schools and to ascertain whether these goals have been achieved.

2. SED and BOE must define and gather data on schools to more accurately measure school and student performance. In this study of a small sample of eleven schools, EPP found three instances where school performance data was suspect. One school contained an unofficial "mini school" and in another school the principal stated that he suspected that student achievement scores from an annex of another school located in his building may have been combined with his school. In the third instance, the performance of the school that had been created from two schools was difficult to evaluate because student performance data were still being reported for the two schools, not the unified school. A larger issue is the Board of Education's frequent use of a norm-referenced analysis of test results rather than a criterion-referenced analysis. Test results analyzed on the basis of norms (that is, whether students' average scores fell below or above the average for all students in the city) are not as meaningful as test results analyzed on the basis of a specific criteria (that is, whether students' average scores fell below or above what students *should* score at a given grade level). By analyzing scores on the basis of a norm for the city, half the schools and half the students will be below the city norm and half will be above. What parents and the public need to know is the percentage of students that are performing at acceptable levels for their grade.

3. BOE must present a clearer picture of the percentage of students performing at grade level on standardized tests in school report cards and other publicly distributed measures of school and district performance. The current "Annual School Report" distributed for elementary schools during the 1995-96 school year devotes two full pages to measuring the performance of all students or students in selected grades against city, state, and national norms and standards on the basis of scores on five standardized tests. However, not one of the seven tables of statistics actually provides information on what the norms or standards mean. Table 1 is particularly confusing for the average parent of an elementary or middle school student because it presents statistics on the number of the school's students in grades three, six and eight meeting the state's standards. Not stated was that the state's standards are very low: they are based on the percentage of children testing above the bottom quartile of test takers. Most parents of children in a given school would not have understood, for example, that when 65% of the school's students met the state's standard for third grade reading, more than two thirds of students could have been performing below third grade reading levels as measured by the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test. As of September 1, 1996, the state's standards for school performance have been increased for all elementary and middle school grades to 90% of students testing above the bottom quartile. This higher standard, however, will give parents and the public no indication of the percentage of students in a school that are performing at grade level.

4. Student achievement statistics must no longer separately report the performance statistics on general education students and mildly disabled students. New state education regulations require the public reporting of special education students' test results by school, but test results will still be given separately for general education students and for special education students. The quality of a school's instructional program should be measured by the test results of all its students without distinction between general and special education for a variety of reasons. An important reason is to ensure the integrity of measurements of school performance. The Institute for Education and Social

Policy of New York University in its October 1995 policy paper, *Focus on Learning*, reported that in 1985 and 1992, NYU found that 84% and 85% of students classified as learning disabled did not meet the clinical definition or state standard for placement in these special education programs. A contributing factor in the high numbers of children referred to special education programs for the mildly disabled may be that their scores are reportedly separately from those of students in general education and resource room programs. Richard L. Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen of the National Research Center on Student Learning and Achievement in English, in an article in the August 7, 1996 issue of *Education Week*, comment on how school-performance monitoring programs, like the SURR list, may be tempting principals to make more referrals to special education programs: "Allowing schools to continue to exempt students with disabilities from public-accountability frameworks also continues the current incentive to identify low-achieving children as disabled in order to artificially enhance reported student achievement levels (removing the lowest-achieving children from the public accountability reports raises the reported achievement)." If school-performance monitoring leads to the possibility of genuine sanctions, there will be even more of a temptation to raise the average level of student achievement in a given school by merely referring the low-achieving students to special education programs.

Even if this is less of a factor in over referrals to special education than supposed, the inclusion of this population's academic achievement in the overall measurement of a school's performance will encourage a greater attention to curriculum and academic performance for special education children. As Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen conclude, there are "enormous incentives for dumping low-achieving children into special education and then providing services that produce minimal academic benefit." Special education students whose level of disability makes testing inappropriate are exempted. But most special education students are tested, though some are allowed testing modifications, such as more time. Currently, school principals have little control over the administration and instruction of segregated special education programs within their buildings. EPP makes this recommendation for the inclusion of special education test results in overall school performance measurements under the assumption that principals would also be given more direct oversight over the instructional programs for special education students in their schools. Some care, however, must be taken in accurately identifying the students' schools. Schools that are overcrowded tend to send students to segregated placements in other schools. Schools that are underutilized tend to accept special education students from other schools. Since the Board of Education has been able to account for students at school annexes, the variety of locations of special education programs should not prove an insurmountable problem so long as students referred to segregated placements outside the building still remain identified as students of the originating school. Since we assume that, in most cases, the inclusion of special education test scores will lower a school's measurement of performance, the proper identification of a student's "home" school will not provide some schools with no special education classes an unfair advantage.

5. Provide more training to all school staff, parent groups, and policy-making bodies on understanding school and student performance statistics. Principals and planning committee members whom we interviewed for this study readily admitted that they had not utilized information they had received on students' testing results. Some even confessed that they had not understood them. With technical assistance from the State Education Department and the central Board of Education staff, principals, teachers, and other planning team members discovered a powerful tool for analyzing what worked and what students needed the most help. Parent groups also need to develop a better understanding of performance statistics if they are to play a meaningful role in school planning teams and the evaluation of the performance of principals and teachers. Similarly, policy makers need to have a full understanding of standards and norms of school and student performance if they are to provide meaningful oversight.

STRENGTHEN AND ENRICH THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM AND STAFF IN ALL SCHOOLS, ESPECIALLY THOSE SERVING HIGH-POVERTY COMMUNITIES

From the 19th century on, there were complaints about standardized, lock-step curricula in public schools. By the end of the 1970's, considerable initiative was given to community schools districts, principals, and teachers in crafting what and how students should learn at each grade level. Reflecting this new flexibility, the central Board of Education issued "guidelines" for curricula for each grade and each subject and community school districts fashioned "standards." In the 1991 collective bargaining agreement between the Board of Education and the United Federation of Teachers, under the concept of teacher "professionalism," principals could no longer compel a teacher to submit lessons plans for review. But by 1994, both the State Education Commissioner and the City Chancellor began to earnestly deal with the emerging reality that district and school staff had only a rudimentary understanding of curricula and its alignment across and between grades and within subject matter. Teacher training institutions were also, apparently, not providing their students with knowledge of curricula. However, even these improvements in college-level education department course offerings may not help. Many newly-hired teachers in high-poverty schools are only given a temporary license, because they have not taken the requisite number of education courses in college. These problems were exacerbated by the first Board of Education early retirement program instituted to lower the overall payroll costs in 1991, when large numbers of experienced professionals left. By 1994, EPP found that one out of every four principals and one out of every six teachers had less than five years experience in the New York City public school system.

The lack of focused curricula seems to be especially true in special education programs for more moderately disabled students and for schools in low-income neighborhoods. Because of the expanding education system and because of the growth in immigrant populations, more numerous job openings for principals and teachers occurred in these programs and in low-income, high-immigrant neighborhoods. Thus, in New York City public schools the least experienced teachers serve students with the greatest academic needs. Faced with challenges that even experienced teachers would find difficult, these new teachers frequently quit in frustration or remain in these school only until they are able to transfer out to other schools in 5 years. The result is that schools in low-income neighborhoods tend to have the highest staff turn-over rate in the state, further de-stabilizing the academic environment of these children.

The great irony is that standards for experience, expertise and skills of administrators and teachers in schools serving high-poverty communities and special education programs should be higher than the norm. Board of Education, high school, and community school district staff training on curriculum alignment, supervision skills, teacher peer evaluation techniques, college and university teacher and principal training assignments, and linkages and partnerships should be targeted to schools serving the lowest-income communities. Instead, in at least two community school districts, but still prevalent in other districts, efforts are made to compensate schools with lower poverty levels (though far higher than the state average) with grants or special programs because these schools do not get additional federal Title I funds. The fear that additional resources and programs will be squandered by staff in low-performing schools also may be a factor. This only reinforces the need to ensure that schools serving low-income communities have highly capable administrators and teachers who can utilize the additional half a million to two million dollars in extra state and federal funds in ways that maximize student learning.

6. Strengthen curricula in all schools and align it across grades and within subject matter. While curriculum frameworks as well as voluminous guidelines and standards exist, the extent of their implementation at the classroom level in all schools is an open question. For institutions of higher learning where a majority of graduates will be teaching in New York City schools, there should be required courses on the curriculum frameworks and standards adopted by the Board of Education. More instructional structure should be encouraged at the school level through sustained training of principals in curricula and alignment and district briefings for new teachers. At a minimum, curriculum standards and materials must be communicated to all teachers. Any infusion of textbook funds must be accompanied by a requirement that grades and courses must be aligned. In addition, since textbook sales staff play a more direct and important role in consulting with principals and superintendents in creating curriculum and alignment than is generally recognized, the Board of Education should brief area sales staff more thoroughly on curriculum frameworks and standards of performance. The State Education Department and the Board of Education should continue to explore the possibility of changing standardized tests in all grades from those that measure comprehension to those that require mastery of subject matter and higher-level problem solving skills.

7. Strengthen teacher training and performance in all schools. Better training of teachers and better supervision of instruction should be encouraged. SED and BOE must secure the commitment of universities and colleges to expand classroom experience by requiring student teaching in the first year of choosing to major in education and to place student teachers in SURR schools. The 1991 collective bargaining agreement that teachers no longer have to submit lesson plans for review by principals should be repealed. The peer review program, where teachers are trained on how to evaluate other teachers in their schools, should be funded as a pilot program in a given number of SURR schools. $108,000 for planning grants of $2,000 was allocated to schools in community school districts during the 1995-96 school year for peer review. Ironically, none of the districts with a high number of SURR schools applied for these funds. School teams, made up of principals, teachers and parents should be allowed to hire instructional staff with safeguards that openings have been widely announced and that the most qualified staff are hired.

8. Better oversight of principals' performance. The common practice of granting tenure to principals where less than a third of students are performing at grade level is surprising and disheartening. It also tends to reflect very low expectations for low-income students by district school officials, since to EPP's knowledge virtually all schools that fall below these performance levels serve this demographic population. Irrespective of any change in education law or union agreement, superintendents must begin to develop objective standards for adequate principal performance. Unfortunately, even parents with a sophisticated understanding of student performance measures and state standards cannot decipher from the school report card the percentage of students at or above grade level in their child's school. For this reason, recommendations #3 and #4 need to be implemented, so that parents can better assess the performance of principals.

9. Introduce more high quality, school-based art, music, journalism, and literature programs in schools. Unfortunately, some of the collaborations between arts organizations and public schools expose only a few students to the benefits of professional expertise in these areas and are funded only on a short-term basis. The result of this type of linkage is that the arts programs become high profile, "add-on's" to schools that are largely devoid of art and extracurricular activities. In contrast, most of the schools that we studied for this report had a strong arts program that was infused throughout the instructional program and that included most students in the school. What is particularly sad in many low-performing schools is the absence of even minimal levels of fun activities for students.

10. Require school staff to provide a "student-centered" and "parent-friendly" environment. This is a particular need in schools serving low-income neighborhoods, where too often both students and their parents are perceived by school staff as passive recipients of services. Unlike schools serving middle-class communities, where some element of fun for children and communication with parents is the norm, many schools serving high-poverty and high-immigrant communities tend to be joyless institutions with a stress on discipline and isolated from the surrounding community. Since there are a variety of programs and even differing concepts of parental involvement, school staff members need to be given a wide variety of strategies they can adopt.

11. Strengthen bilingual and ESL programs. Failure to serve LEP populations was cited in EPP's 1988 report on the state's school improvement program. Eight years later, among most of the schools that were removed from the SURR list, this group of students did not experience the benefits of school improvement or show progress in attaining higher achievement levels. More funds from federal and state bilingual grants and other funding sources should be provided directly to schools for them to develop more effective programs, since virtually the entire growth in the city's school population has come from recent immigration. Since students' difficulties in acquiring the English language accounts for some of the achievement gap between students in the city and the rest of the state, EPP does not understand why so few dollars have been invested in experimenting with a variety of instructional strategies to ensure that LEP students gain a mastery of academic subjects in English and, as a matter of parental choice, in their native language. Surprisingly, EPP found that a high proportion of funds from state bilingual grants coming to New York City, which were threatened for elimination by the Governor, were used to provide generic staff development or to facilitate the administration of testing with very little funds left over to allow schools to develop model bilingual or ESL programs. As we have recommended in the past, bilingual monitoring itself must go beyond issues of administrative compliance and focus on effectiveness, regardless of what strategy is used for English-language attainment.

12. Create more collaborations between schools and outside institutions, corporations, community-based organizations, and foundations.
A large number of such collaborations tend to be in Manhattan, with schools serving the "outer boroughs" left with few partnerships with volunteer organizations and corporations. Colleges and universities with programs to prepare teachers and principals have fewer linkages to schools in high-poverty neighborhoods, though ironically, their graduates are more likely to be employed in these settings because of the high staff turnover. School buses, a certain number now utilized at no extra cost for school field trips, could be used to facilitate the transportation of volunteers to and from schools.

SANCTIONS AND REWARDS

We believe that the SURR program and any program by the New York City Board of Education to identify low-performing schools should not be an exercise in public shaming, but should be a data-driven monitoring program to ensure that children from low-income communities are receiving an instructional program that brings them up to state norms of academic achievement. Current discussion of public education issues are replete with calls for "accountability." But strategies for creating genuine accountability require real consequences for individuals for poor instructional performance. The main value in identifying academic failure is the hope that it is the beginning point of developing strategies for success, and the corollary to this is that the academic success of students should have a positive consequence for the careers of individuals.

A results-oriented system, the goal of much corporate sector rethinking and restructuring, seems to be more difficult to implement in public school systems beyond the

level of rhetoric. Urban school systems, in particular, have been characterized as far back as the 19th century as a major source of jobs and contracts, with educational performance relegated to a secondary consideration. 100 years later, this still seems to be the political environment within which the New York City Board of Education functions at the city and state levels. A results-oriented approach to education threatens vested interests. In light of this, the State Education Department must be credited with pursuing an effort to curtail unacceptably low student achievement rates in New York City under three Commissioners in the face of varying levels of cooperation by the Board of Education, unions, and the state legislature.

The most significant danger to school improvement comes from behind-the-scenes efforts to save the jobs of staff of low-performing schools. It has been long rumored that principals in some districts are appointed as the result of bribes. Special Commissioner of Investigation for the NYC School District, Edward Stancik, has verified that these rumors have some foundation in fact by tape recording bribery offers to willing community school board members. Further complicating matters, unions have sought job protection rights for their members, even those characterized as poor instructors. Currently, there is an agreement with the United Federation of Teachers that 50% of the teaching staff will remain in a "redesigned" school under the newly created "Chancellor's District" and 66% of the teaching staff will remain in a "redesigned" school remaining in a community school district. The end result of these agreements in a few years may be that "closure" or "redesign" will largely amount to a fictitious event, with much of the staff remaining in place but "reorganized." The clock will then be allowed to start for another three years, and unacceptably low student academic achievement levels will continue to be tolerated.

The larger context for EPP's stress on the full implementation of sanctions is that we believe that they must be equally balanced by programs that reward high-performing schools and their employees in low-income, high-immigrant neighborhoods. The issue of rewards also presents an array of political problems. Too often, in the past, Board of Education officials have sought to create inducements to attract teachers to work in high-poverty schools, irrespective of the school's performance, such as providing extra preparation periods for teachers and floating ideas such as building parking lots adjacent to the school. These rewards, however, tend to send an unfortunate message that inducements are needed to teach in certain neighborhoods. Another problem is that rewards were not linked to performance because that union officials have been as fearful of unfair administrative favoritism of selective teachers as they have been about harassment.

Chancellor Crew's efforts in May 1996 to publicize forty-seven elementary schools with poverty rates above 90% where more than half the students are at or above grade level in either math or reading is a promising beginning of linking recognition with performance in low-income neighborhoods. Furthermore, the reports give credit to a whole school effort. State grants of $5,000 to SURR schools that have improved are also a good beginning. But more should be done to recognize and positively reinforce administrators, teachers, and other school staff that have raised the academic performance of their low-income students above the norm for city schools.

13. Work with the unions that represent principals and teachers to create incentives and rewards for professionals serving high-poverty communities who succeed in bringing their students up to state standards. Since many children from low-income communities, some of whom do not speak English, come to school with greater academic needs, administrators, teachers and planning team members who create an instructional program in their schools that bring these children up to state norms should be recognized as "master" principals, "master" teachers and "model" planning teams. Rather than selectively identifying only a few outstanding individuals as a "master"

in any given school, administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals who assist them should be eligible for a school-wide reward if students in a school serving high-poverty neighborhoods meet state standards for academic achievement. The Board of Education should develop strategies with teacher and principal collective bargaining units on how to create meaningful incentives and rewards, but only if the school-wide effort by these professionals succeed.

14. Total reorganization or closure of schools must remain an ultimate sanction and it must be utilized within a set time period. Given the overcrowding in some New York City school districts, all school buildings available must be used. By closure, we mean that a new school staff is organized to utilize the building that used to house the SURR school. Changes in state regulations have now made the SURR process clearer. Local school districts are now responsible for school improvement efforts from the beginning of the process and there is a clearer three-year time line for appropriate actions. EPP supports these changes with the understanding that failure to improve will lead to school redesign or closure, not yet another lengthy attempt at rescue during which students continue to fall behind academically. Sixteen schools placed on the SURR list in 1989 have remained low-performing for five years. SED has now required the New York City school district to take "corrective action." Initially, the Chancellor stated that the schools would all be reorganized, but subsequent public statements clarified that in many of these schools only the principal was replaced, while others were being "redesigned" with much of the current school staff essentially in place. Our concern is that "redesigns" of schools could become even more modest in the future, thus negating the effectiveness of this sanction.

EPP believes, on the basis of the findings of this study, that the ultimate sanction of redesign or closure of schools has made the SURR program more effective than its predecessor, especially in encouraging the creation of effective planning teams and the willingness of staff to try new methods of instruction. Many of these schools have seen a rapid turnover of principals, so the removal of yet another principal provides insufficient motivation for some staff members to work collectively to turn around their school. The thorny question is whether staff members who were performing at lower levels than their colleagues should be able to remain in a "redesigned" school. EPP believes these individuals' employment rights should be protected, but that "employment rights" should not carry more weight than the urgent need to create a new educational environment for students.

In addition, the academic improvement of students in the schools we visited came from a "whole school approach." We were told by various members of school planning teams that before their school was placed on the SURR list, capable teachers remained isolated in their classrooms trying to do the best they could with the children in their classroom, but with little knowledge of the textbooks and curriculum in other classrooms. With the threat of school closure, they developed the leadership skills to work towards collective action and the improvement of the entire instructional program. The new state SURR regulations create a limit of three full academic years before the sanction of corrective action is invoked. This is a sufficient enough time period within which well-intentioned teachers can work with their principals to create effective planning teams so that the school is not redesigned. The NYC Schools Chancellor, however, has entered into agreements with the United Federation of Teachers allowing 50% of the staff to remain in the "redesigned" school in the newly created "Chancellor's district" and allowing 66% to remain in a "redesigned school" in a community school district. If the sanction of job loss is only selectively invoked, so that higher performing teachers have a good chance to remain, these teachers may simply wait out the three years rather than work towards emergency, collective action.

15. The State Education Department and the Board of Education, jointly or separately, must be empowered to intercede in districts with high numbers of SURR schools. Should community school districts remain part of the governance structure of the New York City public school system or be replaced by another subunit of the New York City public school district, they should be held responsible for low-performing schools within their jurisdictions. In the 1995-96 school year, Community School District #9 in the Bronx had thirteen SURR schools, Community School District #10 in the Bronx had nine, Community School District #7 in the Bronx had seven, and Community School District #8 in the Bronx and #5 in Manhattan were tied with six SURR schools each. So far, the courts have issued different rulings as to whether the Chancellor can take actions to ensure instructional effectiveness by community school districts. Possibly, legislation is needed to explicitly give the State Education Department and the New York City Board of Education the authority to act decisively to end poor instructional environments for children.

16. Large numbers of schools must not be identified for corrective action all at one time. Instead, SED and BOE should continue to identify a more manageable number so that the identification of low-performing school leads to instructional improvement or the total reorganization of schools where performance has not improved significantly. The first efforts of SED in 1985 consisted largely of public disclosure and "shaming." With 393 New York City schools out of 504 schools identified as low-performing, the state's school improvement staff was spread too thinly to make much of an impact. Its 1989 SURR effort identified fewer schools and was more successful in actually raising the performance in 29% of them after schools had been in the program for at least two years. Under Commissioner Mills, however, the SURR program has been changed once again, with no specified limit as to how many schools will be designated but with an unambiguous three-year time limit for improvement before corrective action must be taken. Unofficially, we have been told that plans are that upwards of 40 to 80 schools a year will be cited by the state for low-performance. Given the new arrangement whereby the local school districts are to provide sustained technical assistance, their continued involvement is presenting data to keep some schools off "the list," and the districts' continued monitoring of progress or lack of progress of schools "on the list," local districts will soon find themselves stretched thin.

The identification of even 40 schools per year may place too large an administrative and monitoring burden on the New York City school district given the shorter time period for corrective action. In a mere three years, the Board of Education staff could find themselves working with upwards of 200 to 300 schools through the various processes of defending various schools from inclusion on the SURR list, providing technical assistance to schools currently on "the list," and "redesigning" corrective action schools and monitoring the progress of schools that have already been "redesigned." If these efforts are spread too thinly over hundreds of schools, effectiveness will be lost. Chancellor Crew, in his budget request to the Mayor and the City Council for the 1996-97 school year, asked for $6.65 million to build the capacity of field-based teams to work with 124 low-performing schools and to improve assessment of student achievement. No city funds were provided for these new functions, though there are additional state funds that could be used for these purposes. Given limited staff and limited funds to provide sustained technical assistance and oversight to anywhere from 116 schools to 124 schools in the 1996-97 school year, the new state SURR program may already have placed the New York City school district at some risk of over extending its ability to provide meaningful assistance to low-performing schools and schools that have been "redesigned."

FUNDING ISSUES

17. Successful programs must have sustained funding through both public and private sources. BOE needs to provide more assistance to principals, especially those in the boroughs outside of Manhattan and those serving low-income, high-immigrant communities, in identifying private sources of funding. Legislature should further increase Extraordinary Needs Aid funds so that successful after-school, Saturday programs, and guidance counseling services can be sustained. The funding community needs to recognize that continuing foundation support for effective programs can be as important to their mission as developing initial pilot projects.

18. The Board of Education and the State Education Department must monitor schools' and districts' use of Title I and PCEN funds for instructional effectiveness. Both the state and the city should continue to explore ways in which schools and districts where students make limited academic progress, despite infusions of Title I and PCEN funds, can be identified. Strategies should be developed to encourage these districts and schools to direct a greater proportion of funds into teaching positions and to improve the quality of instructional and remedial programs. State and city education officials could also require schools and districts to adopt a prescriptive program to improve low student achievement, with the threat of withholding funds. At a minimum, both the State Education Department and the central Board of Education must stop the practice of redirecting state PCEN funds from Title I schools to other schools to "compensate" them for not being eligible for Title I funds.

II. CASE STUDIES

Since all of the schools we visited were at one time on the SURR list, and of these a majority had been on earlier lists of city and state low-performing schools, the staff were more experienced than most in presenting "a public face." In other words, they knew how to conduct tours for outside groups of monitors, field intrusive interview questions, and tell the "story" of their school. The questionnaire guide was partially constructed with this in mind, requiring those interviewed to repeat the "story" several times in response to different questions. Nevertheless, in most cases the discrepancies in the interviews were not significant, though some of the reoccurring contradictions were and are discussed in the first section. As stated earlier, many of the principals interviewed were familiar with Ronald Edmonds' writings on effective schools, which has helped to shape the perceptions of many educators in New York City for the last twenty years, and he was cited with some frequency. Undoubtedly, his concepts have influenced the "story" as well as the questions we asked.

On-site school visits and interviews can provide, at best, only a "snapshot" of the opinions of school staff at one point in time. Schools continue to change and to experience improvements in student achievement levels as well as decreases. With the exception of those members with years of experience as principals and teachers, one of the unexamined preconceptions of the many of the EPP Monitoring Committee members before the start of the study was that these schools, if their performance truly had improved, would begin a sustained and unbroken upward trajectory towards higher and ever higher levels of student achievement. The principals and school planning team members that were interviewed disabused us of this pat notion of evolutionary development. School improvement remains an "up and down," "two steps forward, three steps back" experience for both administrators and staff. And most sobering of all, there is no magic threshold through which the school staff, students, and parents emerge after which they can coast along. School improvement continues to take extra effort. From all our interviews, we learned that even when it gets "easier," it doesn't get "easy."

Schools and staff were promised that their identities would be kept confidential. Rather than create fictitious names for them in this report, schools are designated by an approximation of the number of students they serve and individuals are identified by their function. Of the ten schools, eight are located in very high-poverty areas and two are in what could be considered working class neighborhoods with poverty rates that are still high. Poverty rates cited at the beginning of each school description are from the 1994-1995 school year as reported by the Board of Education's budget office in memo BOR #1, August 1996, Table G:5. The percentage of elementary and middle school students scoring below state academic standards (bottom quartile of scores on standardized tests) in reading and math after improvement that are cited at the end of each case study are from the Board of Education's "1994-95 Annual School Report." Comparisons between the school's and the district's percentages of students falling below the Board of Education's standards (bottom 25% on the DRP reading test or bottom 15% on the CAT math test) come from BOR #1, August 1996, Table H:4, with percentages rounded to the nearest percent. High school achievement data comes from the State Education Department for the 1993-94 school year. The summary of measures showing improvement are from Table 4-B in the Appendix. All schools serve mostly African-American and Latino students, some of them from families that have recently come to the United States. The data on the percentage of students that have limited English Proficiency (LEP) come from the "1994-95 Annual School Reports."

One last note is the description of the physical rehabilitation of some schools may inadvertently give the impression that most low-performing schools had been in a state of

disrepair when placed on the SURR list. Where no mention is made is of repairs, (seven out of ten schools) it is because the building conditions did not pose a significant problem. In two of the ten schools there had been or continues to be a problem of overcrowding. The majority of the schools we visited, however, were far below capacity before the turn around because 1) parents were choosing other schools (many having to manufacture other addresses to do so) or 2) the neighborhood had lost population in a transition from being a stable working class neighborhood to an unstable concentration of poor people living among many abandoned apartment buildings.

The Elementary Schools

P.S. 400

Placed on list 1989 to 1992
Student Poverty Rate: 75%
Students with limited English: 4%
Improved in 7 out of 9 Measures

When the new principal entered the school in February 1990, less than a third of the students could read at grade level. He saw the lunchroom in chaos and bathrooms and bulletin boards destroyed by vandalism and graffiti. The teachers ran the building because there was no leadership coming out of the main office. Classrooms were grouped homogeneously, with each grade containing "a top" class and "a bottom" class. The teacher assigned to the "bottom" had to deal with all the students with discipline problems. The new principal realized that "the children who entered the school on the bottom remained on the bottom throughout their stay at P.S. 400."

In an on-site interview with the principal and a phone interview with a kindergarten teacher, we were told that the school improvement program focused on reading and math instruction and encouraging parent involvement. The principal found that there was no textbook continuity. The teachers had been individually choosing the curricula they liked best. As a result, first graders in one class would be taught from a basal reader and then move on to a second grade class that used a literature-based reading program. In the third grade they would be back to the basal approach. The principal outfitted the school with one set of textbooks, a basal reading series, for four years, but in the fifth year the entire teaching staff adopted a literature-based textbook series. District and state education staff were brought in to provide staff development for the teachers. The kindergarten teacher remarked, "We did a lot of curriculum and standards work. We followed our state and district mandates and coordinated learning experiences throughout the school."

"Learning to Read through the Arts," a special program for students testing in the lower quartile, was very enthusiastically received because the staff could see that it made learning fun. (The program is no longer funded.) Yet of all schools visited by the EPP Monitoring Committee, P.S. 400 had some of the most extraordinary art work in classrooms. One classroom's walls were completely covered by large green leaves made out of construction paper so that the effect was like walking into a green hut. The principal also instituted "Peer Tutoring" that paired high-achieving students with low-achieving students, a program that the teachers have found improves the academic performance of both students. Now that the classrooms are heterogeneously grouped, many of the school's disciplinary problems have ended.

A School Improvement Team was formed, which included some parents and many members of the staff, such as aides, the custodian, the school secretary, and, of course, teachers. Even though the committee was very large, every staff member at the school got notes about every meeting. This team was critical to the school's turning around. The

kindergarten teacher stated, "It was very important that we wrote down our mission statement and goals -- that they were in writing so everyone in the school could read them...We were after major changes involving the parents and the community. We got lots and lots of support. Another thing that happened, that changed, was that all the teachers began talking with each other about our ideas about changes that could be implemented." The principal also instituted monthly testing of students through CIMS (Comprehensive Instructional Management System), which is a computer driven program that allows individual schools to use their computers to create and mark their own tailor-made tests. CIMS enabled the teachers and the principal to see how well the students had mastered particular skills and to identify those students who needed help. But it also gave teachers and the principal feedback on how well teachers were communicating their lesson plans. Several of them, as a result, changed lesson plans they had been using for years. The principal, as he got to know teachers, tried to match teachers to the grade-level which suited their personalities.

From the principal's point of view, "parent's should be insiders on what's going on." Parent involvement was part of the mission statement . "The staff learned that it was necessary to aggressively encourage parental involvement," said the kindergarten teacher. Workshops were sponsored to keep parents informed and to increase their involvement. The custodian's participation on the planning team influenced him, so teachers went ahead with his agreement and organized painting parties. The dark and gloomy halls and classrooms were made light and airy, so that everyone could see the change. Rugs, which were donated by the parents' association, were put on the floor in the kindergarten rooms, which turned out to be a very important morale booster because it made the classes more fun for the teachers and students.

But the kindergarten teacher cautioned that of all the improvements, parent involvement was the most constant task because of the high rate of mobility in the neighborhood (one fourth of the student body leaves the school each year because their families relocate). Parents that have become active leave in a year or two and a whole new set of parents have to be brought into the school through events and workshops. The principal also expressed frustration that so many of the new children coming into the school had to be brought up to the academic standards that he expected of P.S. 400's students, "The challenge is continuous, it just doesn't end. If we don't all work very hard we could get on the SURR list again." In 1995, 13.3% of third grade students and 33.3% of sixth grade students tested in the bottom quartile on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test. On the PEP Mathematics standardized test, 3.3% of third graders and 20.0% of sixth graders tested in the bottom quartile of test takers. While 33% of students in the community school district in grades three to nine test below the Board of Education's standards, 35% of the students in this school test below this standard.

P.S. 450

Placed on list 1989 to 1993
Student Poverty Rate: 95%
Students with limited English: 39%
Improved in 9 out of 13 Measures

P.S. 450 was started in the late 1960's as a special magnet school for Spanish-speaking children from elementary through to the eighth grade. When the EPP Monitoring Committee toured the school, we could see that the building was a converted warehouse. There is only one separating wall cutting through each floor, so most classrooms are organized by the placement of furniture as barriers between each class. Each grade level is divided into two classes, English only and English-Spanish. Had the classes not been

orderly, the noise would have been disorienting. The principal was selected in 1992 in a battle so heated there was a fist fight. He had been a member of the school's original staff in 1969, but had left P.S. 450 in 1981. This was one of the four schools visited where the interviewees did not describe a demographic shift in the community that resulted in a change in student characteristics and placement on the SURR list. Both the principal and the staff person interviewed believed that the school had been placed on the SURR list and remains at risk of returning to the SURR list because so many of the students are not English speaking. The problem of low academic achievement in English by non-English speaking children has become even more serious. The UFT Chapter Chairperson stated that since the school had been removed from SURR list, they are beginning to get Spanish speaking students who do not know how to read in Spanish, a new and additional challenge for the school staff.

In his first year as principal, reading scores rose by 15 points. The principal changed the curriculum so that more student time was devoted to learning reading, writing, whole language, and math. He eliminated the Spanish enrichment program as well as other courses. The fourth floor is devoted to computer instruction labs, an important support to classroom instruction. The rapid improvement in academic achievement of students is also credited to three other factors: 1) There were significant changes in the faculty. Teachers who felt that they were not doing their jobs left voluntarily, while other had to be "persuaded" to go. Their replacements, while some still do not hold permanent teaching certificates, have been enthusiastic and good instructors. 2) The principal and the staff focused on the mission of the school. The enthusiasm of the school planning team helped the turnaround of P.S. 450. 3) A good working relationships between the principal, the faculty and students developed. Staff development workshops are held every Wednesday, but they are not mandatory. While there are no regularly scheduled staff meetings, lunch times are arranged so that teachers at the same class level can talk.

The school has a "museum" with changing exhibits. While we were there, it was a wall of fish tanks with brightly colored tropical fish. The children who were ushered in were clearly enthralled. A music program developed through a partnership with a private company is an important part of the school and an important morale booster for the principal, teachers and students. Another important focus in the school is sports, both in fielding middle school teams and sports reporting features in the school's newsletter, published by eighth grade students. But student poems, in both English and Spanish, are also featured prominently in the newsletter. There is a strong parents' association that works with the staff in all areas of curriculum, and several volunteer during the day in the school, which is how the library is staffed. The school receives various grants and has a working relationship with a university. In 1995, 37.0% of third grade students and 12.0% of sixth grade students tested in the bottom quartile on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test. On the PEP Mathematics standardized test, 3.0% of third graders and 15.2% of sixth graders tested in the bottom quartile of test takers. While 58% of students in the community school district in grades three to nine test below the Board of Education's standards, 52% of the students in this school test below this standard.

P.S. 500

Placed on list 1989 to 1993
Student Poverty Rate: 95%
Students with limited English: 9%
Improved in 5 out of 6 Measures

When the school was built in 1967, the population in the area was so large that there were two annexes. But during the late 1970's and early 1980's, African-American working class families began to leave the neighborhood, and abandoned buildings became common. P.S. 500's student population and those of another school dropped to such an extent that the

two schools were combined into one. By 1988, this school was ranked 617 out of 619 elementary schools in New York City on the basis of student scores on standardized reading tests. When the new principal walked into the school, she saw "an overwhelmingly dismal physical and social environment." In a joint interview with the principal, the parent association president, and 7 teachers, they listed the major problems of P.S. 500 when it was placed on the SURR list: 1) a "deteriorated" educational program with no reading or math programs; 2) a building in a state of physical disrepair; 3) a non functioning library; 4) an "exceptionally" negative parent group; and 5) very poorly controlled children. Some of the classrooms did not have doors. When the principal walked into the library, it was covered with cobwebs and the books were very outdated. Anything put on the bulletin boards in the halls was quickly defaced, torn down, or destroyed. Children frequently left their classrooms. Security was so bad that people off the streets could be found wandering inside the halls, and there was theft of food supplies. The conflict between some parents and teachers reached such a crisis point that staff members became a target for harassment when they left the school building.

At the time that the new principal was appointed, 13 out of 27 teachers on staff sought employment elsewhere. When the principal did a review of the textbooks and workbooks that the teaching staff had been using, she found that it was a mix of different instructional approaches and in some cases, no discernible approach at all. The strategy of the principal to get P.S. 500 off the SURR list was to 1) improve the physical environment, 2) create a cohesive instructional program, and 3) create a vision for P.S. 500 staff, children and parents.

Just getting the school clean and in a state of good repair was such a task that the school went through 3 custodians in one year. The cleaning, painting, and opening of the library was a major event to all whom we interviewed. A bank helped to reconstruct the playground. At the time of our visit, P.S. 500 was clean, nicely painted, and, most striking of all, the school's halls and classrooms were gaily decorated with beautiful student artwork and projects. Keeping the school clean still remains a strong focus, and the improvements in the physical environment has been important in building student and staff morale.

In order to improve the instructional program, teachers began by meeting at least once a week to discuss what changes should be made. For the first time, teachers began evaluating the instructional program offered by P.S. 500 and "we began to say what we needed." The first order of business was to choose a set of textbooks and workbooks for the staff that reflected a consistent instructional strategy. For the reading program, the staff chose a basal series that stressed phonetics. But after a while they found that it didn't work for their school, and the instructional program was changed to one that combined both communication arts and math. Unsatisfied with the results of this new curriculum approach, the staff choose a literature-based program in which children read whole stories at a time, rather than fragments of basal readers. This third approach did not improve their students test scores or the school's ranking at first, but they kept with this "whole language" approach because the teachers felt strongly that the children were genuinely learning and that eventually their scores would improve. Training teachers in this new method was very important, and they met twice a month for 2 hours at a time. The principal and the teachers at the interview stated that, in retrospect, the instructional staff could not have gone from an incoherent curriculum to "whole language" all at once. The basal approach gave the teaching staff their first experience in developing a unified structure, which was a critical evolutionary first step. By the time they adopted a literature-based approach, they had several years of experience in group planning and analysis. Some of the unlicensed teachers hired in the first year of the principal's appointment proved to be among the leaders in strengthening the academic program.

Math improvement is credited to staff training by a college that challenged the teachers to "really think hard" about the way their students learned. Other improvements came about through a retreat that resulted in the formation of six committees (math, communication arts, social studies, parents, discipline, and science). Remediation for students who were not progressing academically was changed from a "pull-out" model, where students were taken out of a classroom for small group work, to a "push-in" model, where another teacher would come into the classroom to work with the teacher. At the time that EPP visited the school, the principal had programs in conjunction with three universities and three colleges and had secured numerous grants, some of them through a nation-wide competition.

While those interviewed felt that group planning, scheduling, changing the curriculum and method of instruction, and technical support/staff development were all crucial in helping the school move forward, they stated that the key was really the vision of the principal. However, it was also added that the principal must be able to articulate this vision and to get the staff to see it and believe in it. If the principal does not have staff support, the changes cannot take place. The group also felt that constant re-evaluation has sustained the academic growth at P.S. 500. But the principal cautioned that she has learned that academic improvement really means a "series of peaks and valleys -- it's not a straight line going upwards, upwards like I thought."

The school has established a "Student of the Week" program to build a sense of empowerment. The parent association president came in every day to work as a volunteer. While the principal stated that parents were more involved in the school, she was not completely satisfied. P.S. 500 sponsors a Parent Breakfast, makes a special outreach to grandparents, has special workshops, such as one on asthma (a serious health problem in the school), and includes parents in outings to theater and music programs. We were told that one of the most positive differences from the past was that now the people hanging around the outside of the building (there is high unemployment in the area) seem to watch out for the school and staff and will run in to tell them if there is a suspicious stranger lurking about. P.S. 500 is now, they believe, a "community in the community." In 1995, 38.5% of third grade students tested in the bottom quartile on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test. On the PEP Mathematics standardized test, 23.5% of third graders tested in the bottom quartile of test takers. While 43% of students in the community school district in grades three to nine test below the Board of Education's standards, 61% of the students in this school test below this standard.

P.S. 560

Placed on list 1989 to 1991
Student Poverty Rate: 100%
Students with limited English: 24%
Improved in 6 out of 8 Measures

When the new principal came to the school in 1988, the data showed that 85% of the students were reading on or above grade level. Yet, in the first standardized testing cycle the students' scores dropped so dramatically that they indicated that something had been amiss about how the standardized tests were administered in the past. The testing cycles that followed confirmed that the real academic situation was that most students were achieving below grade level. But these more accurate results placed the school on the SURR list, even as the school was beginning to turn around. P.S. 560, which serves a mix of African-American and Hispanic students, was also "physically disgusting," in the words of the principal. In order to show staff that she was trying to improve their work environment, she set about to have the school plastered and painted.

It took the principal, she stated, about two years to "really figure out" what was being taught in the classroom. The instructional methods of the teachers were diverse and traditional, with every teacher using a different reader. In the two kindergarten classes, one teacher had a developmental approach, but the other one, teaching the bilingual class, did not. "But nothing we have done in this school has followed the normal course of development," said the principal. Instead of changing the reading materials from basal to whole language beginning at the kindergarten level, she began at the fifth grade, because it was the fifth grade teachers who volunteered to be the first group to try out this new method of teaching reading. When they reported that it was a much more interesting way of teaching and that their students were being helped with this new approach, other grades converted to the whole language approach. At this stage, the curriculum of the school is aligned. There are not three different types of educational programs in this school, there is one. Special education students are taught using this program, even though its modified to meet their needs.

Another important factor in the school was the "weeding out" of the staff. The principal quoted a colleague who placed teachers in four categories: 1) the willing and the able; 2) the unwilling and the able; 3) the willing and the unable; and 4) the unwilling and the unable. She said that the latter two categories of teachers at P.S. 560 were asked to re-evaluate their teaching careers. About ten percent of the staff left in the first year, but the "weeding out" process has continued every year along with recruiting of new teachers. The replacements have stayed and, since the SURR designation, the staffing has been stable. Both the principal and the staff developer, who was also interviewed, stated that the enthusiasm of the staff on the planning committee and their commitment to get off the SURR list were major factors in the school turnaround. In the past, the teachers spent most of their day within their classrooms, and, after the school day, they went directly home. Now teachers are asking for more help, and the biggest change, is that there is "more talking." The teachers talk with each other. And now that there is a less "authoritarian" atmosphere, the students are more open and less on guard because more of them feel that their teachers are there to help them.

Now, more than half of the school is learning on or above grade level because of the hard work of the principal and the staff. There are a multitude of federal, state, and district grants to the school along with college and university linkages due to the entrepreneurial efforts by the principal. Continual staff development and on-site technical assistance takes place at P.S. 560. There is a Library Power Program, after-school and summer school programs, a greenhouse attached to the school for science projects, a little instrumental band, and a choral "initiative" that brings in a choral director once a week. The stress is on "multiple intelligences" to develop and work with the strengths of each student. Ten percent of the student body lives at the shelter across the street, and even when the family gets permanent housing, most of them manage to keep on attending the school. Efforts to get parent participation are ongoing. The principal stated that the parents at the beginning of the year are wonderful, because they tend to be the ones who want to better themselves and be upwardly mobile. But they become less active by the middle of the year, because they are busy pursuing their goals of educational or economic self improvement. "It is very hard," states the principal, "to keep an active group that stays with the school throughout the entire year." Currently, the staff conducts workshops for parents interested in being in the volunteer program, but also holds workshops on topics of more general interest, such as child development, community resources, and health and nutrition. In 1995, 23.3% of third grade students tested in the bottom quartile on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test. On the PEP Mathematics standardized test, 5.9% of third graders tested in the bottom quartile of test takers. While 60% of students in the community school district in grades three to nine test below the Board of Education's standards, 54% of the students in this school test below this standard.

P.S. 1500

Placed on list 1989 to 1993
Student Poverty Rate: 100%
Students with limited English: 57%
Improved in 3 out of 7 Measures

Built in the last century, the school is very large, but well planned in terms of space. Since the 1950's, it has served a largely Hispanic population of middle class Cuban refugees and working class Puerto Ricans, but by the mid-1980's there was a shift to Dominican families which resulted in far fewer English-speaking students. "It was a shock when we got these new kids -- we handled it very poorly," said the principal. As severe overcrowding became more of a problem (the school had a student register of 1900), reading scores began to drop for three years in a row. As the principal feared, his school was placed on the SURR list, even though P.S. 1500 ranked at the mid-point in average reading scores among all public elementary schools in New York City.

This principal, who has been at the school for 29 years, tried various strategies to prevent getting on the SURR list. He put three of his strongest teachers in the third grade, but two of them were in an automobile accident together and were out for the remainder of the year. When P.S. 1500 was placed on the list, he continued to try other strategies with few positive results. "At the beginning I tried to tell the staff what to do," the principal told us at the interview. "After a month I could see it wasn't going to work. Then I decided to try to make some changes. I threw out a lot of gifted and talented programs to see if the staff would demand that they be put back. I just kept closing down programs to see if there was one they cared enough to keep. But whenever we went on retreats to hotels, it was still just me and an AP that kept coming up with ideas and doing all the talking. It was terrible."

The turn around came when the principal locked himself into his office and made a list of 10 things he cared about. At the top of the list was that every child in P.S. 1500 should be able to read. Then he created a committee that met from 1 to 3 every Wednesday to talk about the list, "which amounted to a lot of soul searching." The principal explained, "The staff didn't want to make decisions and I knew I couldn't make them for them. So all we did was talk about what mattered. And then we started building, but it was no longer me and the A.P." Instead of just focusing on the third grade, the committee began focusing on all grades and on how to strengthen reading. The principal also restructured the bilingual classes and replaced staff who he felt were speaking Spanish all the time in the class and outside the class, and did not seem comfortable speaking English. The principal stated, "I wanted bilingual teachers that could be role models for the kids, to show them that there were adults who could speak both languages fluently. ESL periods are longer now." But he also discovered that the better Spanish-speaking children read in their native language, the better they read in English. The principal and a librarian that was interviewed separately, also credited the school's turnaround to an early-retirement program in 1991 when 25% of the staff left, including two assistant principals. Three years ago, the planning committee broke into three curriculum areas. Planning in the school is still going strong, with five teachers having a joint trip to Costa Rica so that they could spend part of their vacation in meetings together.

Though P.S. 1500 was not as bedecked with art work as the other schools visited, it has a unique program where at the end of the year each class puts on a small play for the other classes that share their hall way. The library, supported by grants and Title I, is a core program for P.S. 1500. Parents are taught how to use the public library and to read to their children in Spanish or English. Children are assigned week-end book reports, so that they have to spend some time reading by Monday. This has resulted in more children writing and

reading than before. Parent workshops are held at 7:30 am and 5:30 pm. The reformed parents' organization does do "a lot" of fundraising, but the AIDP program has made a difference in the level of parental involvement. This Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention program works with children who are truant, but the person who runs the program is "very dynamic" so activities have included visiting sister schools in other states and taking students to Yankee games. The level and quality of parent participation has also been increased by this dynamic individual. Unfortunately, this program's funds were reduced, so many of the activities can no longer be sustained. The school has received numerous grants and now works with two universities. But there is still a 20% mobility rate at the school, with very few of the children remaining in the school for their entire elementary education. In 1995, 51.9% of third grade students tested in the bottom quartile on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test. On the PEP Mathematics standardized test, 13.1% of third graders tested in the bottom quartile of test takers. 56% of students in the community school district in grades three to nine test below the Board of Education's standards and 56% of the students in this school test below this standard.

P.S. 1600

Placed on list 1989 to 1993
Student Poverty Rate: 93%
Students with limited English: 39%
Improved in 7 out of 7 Measures

The predominately Irish, Italian and Scandinavian neighborhood became largely Hispanic and Asian by the 1980's. An ineffective principal, appointed in the mid-1970's, left the school with a history of low staff morale and conflict, student discipline problems, and poor academic achievement. In 1975 the school was put on the list of poorly performing schools (CSIP, see Appendix), but no changes in the school resulted. The principal, it was reported, used the school improvement committee to play one group of teachers off against another group. Too often, the planning meetings degenerated into blame secessions. Staff absenteeism was high. Even class scheduling for this very large school had become chaotic, with some ethnic heritage celebrations spilling over from a day to a week of special events. Poorly functioning teachers from other schools in the district were "dumped" into P.S. 1600. Teachers felt isolated from one another and functioned on their own as a survival mechanism. Because of its size and the poverty of its student body in comparison with other schools in the district, it was also the site for a comprehensive health center with staffing by a nurse, physician, and psychologist, as well as other after-school programs. Ironically, the existence of these programs created additional demands on the principal, whose strength was not administration. His replacement is credited with getting P.S. 1600 off the SURR list. This was the only school EPP members visited where we could not interview the principal credited with turning around the school, and, instead, we interviewed the acting principal, who had been in the school for twenty years as a teacher and administrator and had been on the planning team. However, EPP staff had visited the school and met with the principal at an earlier occasion before he successfully secured employment in another position and had a follow-up phone interview with him after the school visit.

The acting principal related that when the new principal came, he found that the school used five different readers. One system was chosen for the school, and the teachers broke into committees and monitored student progress under the new reading series. Computers were introduced into the classrooms. The district office sent in experts on curriculum to help the staff evaluate progress, to develop "alignment " and "congruence" across grades and among grades and to provide teacher training in other instructional areas. In 1991, a "Dual Language Academy" was initiated in order to integrate children from different ethnic groups, to teach a second language to all students, and to infuse computer technology in all subject areas. The principal stated that the most important milestone for

him was the creation of this "Gifted and Talented" program because it meant that the children were looked at differently. Being bilingual was promoted as a benefit and no longer viewed as a deficit. In the 1994-95 school year, a Core Knowledge curriculum was piloted for all the grades. Now P.S. 1600 has a computerized system that allows the staff to follow each student's academic growth since kindergarten (the CIMS program used in P.S. 400). One of the key elements credited for the turnaround of the school is that almost a third of the staff left or "were asked to leave." The acting principal stated that many of these teachers had been in the system for years and had "retired on the job." The new teachers and those that remained worked with the principal to develop a mission statement and goals to promote "excellence and equity." Their morale improved as they were able to see that changes in instruction were bringing about better student outcomes.

The new planning committee which included the principal, assistant principals and teachers also worked on administrative changes. The principal stated that he worked towards a "community school" concept, and his strategy was to flood the school with activities and programs with outside groups so that everybody felt welcome. He stated, "I was an experienced administrator, I had already been a principal at another school. But this school was so isolated that I was worried that I couldn't begin to meet the needs of the children. So I wanted to invite everyone in who could help." The school adopted a policy of student uniforms, which instantly helped to create a sense of belonging. Greater parental involvement was encouraged, which included a series of workshops for parents to assist them in dealing with problems concerning their children at home. A parent volunteer group was established, and the school now has a "parent room" set aside for their use. On the day when the EPP Monitoring committee came, twenty parents were working at the school on a daily basis to help with hall patrol, morning line-up, dismissal, and other volunteer assignments. The presence of parents in the school has had a positive influence on the behavior of students. The planning committee has continued to stress creating a positive school climate and holding children to high expectations. A strong student government program was developed that has helped build student morale but also has created more parent participation. The staff is now no longer afraid of parents, but see them as part of the school's strength. Even though P.S. 1600 students are poorer than those in the rest of the district's schools, their attendance rate was so high that it had the highest student attendance record in the district in October 1994. The school has a large number of grants and collaborative programs with outside agencies, including a hospital, a college, youth programs, art and music institutions. The physical condition of the school building is good, but constant construction of classroom additions has disrupted class locations every year.

The acting principal felt that the school could not have improved without the SURR designation, even if the same level of resources had been provided, because the school needed instructional and administrative leadership. The staff needed to share a vision and clearly defined goals. Because P.S. 1600 serves so many Hispanic and Asian students who score below the fortieth percentile on the English LAB test, this was one of the factors that, she believes, placed her school on the SURR list. This lag tends to depress student achievement levels at P.S. 1600, even with the remarkable improvement in instruction and environment that came about through the hard work of the principal, other administrators, teachers, parents, and students. In 1995, 51.9% of third grade students tested in the bottom quartile on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test. On the PEP Mathematics standardized test, 13.1% of third graders tested in the bottom quartile of test takers. While 36% of students in the community school district in grades three to nine test below the Board of Education's standards, 45% of the students in this school test below this standard.

The Middle Schools

I.S. 160

Placed on list 1991 to 1994
Student Poverty Rate: 74%
Students with limited English: 6%
Improved in 6 out of 6 Measures

When the principal came in 1985 with a directive from the superintendent to turn around the school, gangs were running the school. All the "problem" students of another district were sent to I.S. 160 along with the other acting-out students of the district. "I don't like the term 'problem student,' because it's pejorative," said the principal, "they're just kids like other kids and the school was working with them. The real problem was instruction." The teachers were either totally inexperienced, because they had just graduated from college, or too experienced and no longer interested in t ving new methods of teaching. Lessons were given through a "chalk and talk" method which did not create interaction in the classroom and which made the subjects boring to many of the students.

Early in 1990, IS 160 pioneered as a "School-Wide" program school, before School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making was initiated by Chancellor Fernandez. The SBM/SDM initiative created school planning teams in high-poverty schools and allowed them to use Title I funds in a flexible manner to improve the whole school, not just for remediation. But the creation of the IS 160 school planning team created problems and controversy. Those who were on the committee were not inclusive in their decision making or good at communicating with other staff members about the decisions that had taken place. A sense that members of the planning committee were an "elite" developed, along with resentment by those not on the committee. But the Title I School-Wide program also brought about positive change. It provided money for a family worker to work with students and their families. A peer mediation program, where the students participated in constructing a positive reward system, also improved the conflict-plagued environment of this small school. Student assignment from the other district was stopped. IS 160 was still attracting "rough kids," and sixty out of its one hundred and sixty students were in Resource Rooms, but the principal felt that the school was doing a good job.

Placement on the SURR list in 1991 for low math scores was a blow to the principal, the planning committee, and the rest of the staff because they believed that the school was improving despite some problems. The principal's strategy was to identify math and communication arts as a special focus of instructional improvement, reduce class size, and focus on first quartile students to improve their achievement levels on tests. The instructional staff began to attend district staff development workshops on how to improve attendance, reading and math. In the first year of being on the SURR list, out of twelve teachers, seven left. But the school still had problems recruiting a licensed math teacher. The principal and planning team abandoned the seven period schedule and created one-hour periods so that there was "time on task" for students. A linkage with a college brought in staff development on how to use manipulatives in math instruction, but there are a plethora of other linkages to colleges, universities, and health and social services agencies. In the past, only thirty-seven percent of ninth grade students passed the Regents' Competency Tests in math. In the 1994-95 school year, the percentage was eighty. While the school still gets "the rougher students in the district," a few students in the district are listing IS 160 as their first choice.

The teacher that was interviewed by EPP told us that she had been working at the school so long that she found herself teaching the children of the children she had taught years ago. She stated that she had decided to stay because the teachers get support and

technical assistance from the school. She was thrilled at having an hour for instruction rather than the old forty five minute session because her students are now completing their homework assignments. She used to dread going to work, now she looks forward to the day. Though there is conflict on staff, the planning committee is strong and goes on retreats. Teacher contacts have brought many notable speakers to the school as well as linkages with small businesses that provide some of the rewards for good student behavior under the peer mediation system, such as discounts on slices of pizza. Sophisticated photography journals have been produced by students working with staff. There is also a "Museum Club" where students take trips to the various museums in New York City.

Forty parents showed up at the parents' meeting just before the EPP Monitoring committee visited the school, a very good showing for a middle school where parent involvement is not the rule. Both the principal and the teacher believed that the parent leaders were knowledgeable and strong advocates for the school, and now that the school is evolving as an "Accelerated Learning" school, the principal and the staff view them as critical to I.S. 160's ability to achieve a higher level of functioning. The principal remarked that the old planning team had been perceived as elitist, with only a chosen few making decisions for the rest of the staff. The new planning team modeled under "Accelerated Learning," in contrast, has a better grasp of the communication process needed to get other staff members to participate and to try innovations. In 1995, 33.3% of eighth grade students tested in the bottom quartile on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test. On the Regents Competency Mathematics standardized test, 43.1% of ninth graders tested in the bottom quartile of test takers. While 47% of students in the community school district in grades three to nine test below the Board of Education's standards, 46% of the students in this school test below this standard (this percentage represents the combined scores of all "mini-schools" associated with a larger umbrella middle school).

I.S. 200

Placed on list 1991 to 1994
Student Poverty Rate: 100%
Students with limited English: 3%
Improved in 2 out of 6 Measures

I.S. 200 occupies the top floor of a large elementary school. Of all schools visited, this middle school was the most staff directed before being put on the SURR list, during time on the list, and after its removal. The planning committee, which includes all staff members, had been meeting every week throughout this period and directed all the changes. The principal, who arrived after the school had been placed on the list, stated that he had not gotten much of an impression of what the school was like before the designation, but that a staff developer from a college told him that the students used to be as noisy in the classroom as they are now playing during recess. The school, serving predominately Hispanic students, was cited by the state SURR program for low math scores. Though the state did not cite the school for a lack of parental participation, there was no functioning parents' association.

The turnaround is credited to a series of improvements: getting a math lab and finally the space to fully utilize it; technical support and staff development that resulted in better and more knowledgeable planning by the school team; staff openings that allowed them to recruit two teachers with a background in math for the first time; and the development of parental participation. The state SURR staff helped the planning team to develop activities in math, English, and parental involvement. A linkage with a college informed the staff that the central Board of Education had a standard curricula for middle school English, which a staff member then obtained. The state's SURR program liaison worked with them on how to teach math, and this was followed up with more training by other staff developers and

attendance at the district's workshops. Most of the teachers were inexperienced, so they had to be shown how to do closed-book practice sessions before major standardized tests were given and how to deal with chronically truant students on the registers so their lack of scores was not counted against the school. The weekly staff meetings branched out into three different committees that also met weekly and also went on retreats. The principal, especially, worked on the problem of parent involvement, but the whole staff worked to make sure that parents knew when students were to take tests so that attendance would improve.

The principal stated that the school has no classes for students with limited-English proficiency or special education students, but that the teachers' improvement in their ability to analyze student achievement allowed them to realize that two to three students in every entering class really do not speak English and that an equal number should have been classified as learning disabled. The classes used to be organized by high and low achieving students, but now they are heterogeneously grouped. Seven forty-five minute classroom periods have been changed to six fifty-minute sessions. With the help of the math lab, teachers focused on improving the math achievement of students at the bottom two quartiles in math. They were assisted by a group of university students who volunteered to tutor students after school hours. Parents were key to further improvements in this area, even after I.S. 200 got off the list. The three parents on the school based team served as the nucleus for the first fledgling parents association, but all three moved out of the district. While still small, a hard core of sophisticated parents have proved to be effective advocates for the school at the district level, and they finally succeeded in getting the full day use of a room for the math lab. A school "museum" and a series of "pow-wows" are scheduled to attract more parents. The school is now following the "Accelerated Learning" model, where both parents and students are part of the school improvement process. More than half of the students who enter the school have listed I.S. 200 as their first choice. In 1995, 33.3% of eighth grade students tested in the bottom quartile on the Degrees of Reading Power standardized test. On the Regents Competency Mathematics standardized test, 43.1% of ninth graders tested in the bottom quartile of test takers. While 47% of students in the community school district in grades three to nine test below the Board of Education's standards, 42% of the students in this school test below this standard (this percentage represents the combined scores of all "mini-schools" associated with a larger umbrella middle school).

The High Schools

H.S. 1700

Placed on list 1989 to 1991
Student Poverty Rate: 43%
Students with limited English: 3%
Improved in 6 out of 9 Measures

In 1980, this vocational school had a student body that came largely from the surrounding working class neighborhood, but eight years later it was 85% African American and from another part of the borough. The working class neighborhood also changed. It became a largely immigrant community that had no history with the school and began sending their children to other high schools in the neighborhood. The high school "Choice" program became another factor. Because H.S. 1700 remained a traditional vocational school, higher achieving students bypassed it in favor of "Career Options" programs offered by other high schools. The school staff did not adjust to a new population of students that often appeared to them to be less motivated and less academically prepared.

In an interview with the principal, the assistant principal for guidance and the teacher who chaired the school's "School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making Committee," a more detailed picture was given. "We were not prepared for these kids. In the past, the kids who came here would have a father who was an auto mechanic, carpenter, or electrician. Now the kids either don't have a father living with them or the father's occupation is not clearly defined. What this means, let's say for auto mechanics, is that there isn't a family member who is also educating the student along with the teachers of auto mechanics. But it wasn't just shop interest or academics. Suddenly we had lots of social service problems and our counseling was inadequate. There were cultural differences between the staff and students that we didn't have before." Ironically, before H.S. 1700 was placed on the list and during most of the time it remained on the list, the school continued to attract large numbers of students because of its reputation as a "safe" school. So this school, unlike many of the other SURR schools, did not experience a drop in population beyond the first year when the newspapers reported its placement on the SURR list.

The three major problems were low achievement, low attendance, and low test scores. It was not unusual during a test for a student to get up from his or her desk and just drop the papers to the floor and storm out of the room. "You'd have a class taking a test, and four or five guys would just get up and leave the room." Support from Project Achieve, a major initiative of Chancellor Joseph Fernandez, was credited with help in turning the school around. "No one was reading or understanding the statistics we were getting. All we knew is that we looked bad. Because we were one of the early Project Achieve schools, the people with that program helped us to understand the reams of data we were getting. This helped us become aware of our performance." A teacher was picked to head the new school improvement planning committee. Working with the principal, the committee members tackled student test taking and attendance. They looked at what kinds of courses worked and what new programs worked to improve students' performance. The chair told us, "You know some school teams are good at discussions. But we really began to use statistics. So it wasn't 'Oh, let's do this or let's try this -- we looked to see if our ideas worked." Just after H.S. 1700 was placed on the list, two new programs suggested by the state school improvement team, Sharing Success and Decision-Making Math, were brought in. But after a year they were judged as not successful. New occupational sequences such as computer drafting, audio visual, building maintenance, business and accounting, foods management, and marketing were created or expanded to better meet the needs of the students. New programs of instruction were instituted based on the team's analysis of student achievement data.

The principal and the planning team looked at building the school around its natural strengths. H.S. 1700 used to have both an academic track and a vocational track. These two tracks were eliminated. In their place, three occupational theme "Houses" were created: Building Trades (electrical, wood), Services (foods, auto, HVAC) and Professional Careers (electronics, computers, CAD, business/accounting). Each House has a strong academic program and a strong guidance program. Each House has a separate physical space for classes built around a space that contains an assistant principal, a guidance counselor, a coordinator from the trade area, an advisor from the academic areas, and an aide that serves as assistant to the counselor and receptionist for the House. There is also an open meeting area in each House with vending machines, computers, and tables for students. Each House has 400 students, and the counselor stays with the students in each house until they graduate. The principal remarked, "Lots of high schools have houses, but they are not real in the sense that they are just capricious themes without special staff or space. Ours are real units with separate courses structured around our traditional strengths as a vocational school and around guidance." Congruence specialists were brought in to help train staff in new techniques, such as cooperative learning and learning styles. Parent outreach is done

primarily through the House structure. Interestingly, a fourth House was also created for special education students, and this resulted in the staff's discovery that many of the students received guidance services for the first time through this structure. Before the creation of the Special Education House they did not understand that most of the special education counselors' primary duties were evaluation and assessment, not working with students after they were placed.

Another factor credited in the turnaround was scheduling. The school faculty was so large that none of them met at the same time. The ninth period on Mondays was cleared for staff development, House meetings, clubs, and the SBM/SDM committee. A tremendous amount of staff development was initiated on how to improve math and writing skills and on effective team planning as well as training for guidance counselors and paraprofessionals. Trainers from district and central as well as several colleges and universities were brought in. Attendance improvement focused on urging parents to make sure their children showed up at exam and test time. The Achieve program provided the school with an automated phone message system that allowed each House to reach all parents with a pre-recorded message just before each test. Parents were told the areas for improvement that had been cited by the state. "The students also had to be convinced just like the staff that they had to change their behavior or the school might close." But student behavior problems still occur. Students who need help beyond the guidance services offered at each House are referred to a CBO that provides them with a self-contained instructional environment. As a result, some students improve and some transfer out to other schools. But of those that return, "when they come back, they're not anti-social."

For this vocational school, another challenge is the current job market. Though the Building Trades House has worked to help the surrounding community fix up buildings in a state of disrepair and cover graffiti, there have been fewer apprenticeship openings because construction jobs have been scarce. Job placement in the other trades has also been a difficulty. But most graduates go on to college, technical school, or work. Even though the principal has worked hard to identify a number of private and public sector linkages that expand work and training opportunities for the school's students, he admits that post-school employment remains a problem in this economy. Currently, passing rates for the Regents Competency tests for HS 1700 students (followed by the averages for the city and the rest of the state) are: 93% Reading (84.7% city/93.9% ROS); 53% Writing (70.3% city/87.7% ROS); 61% Science (55.6% city/82.4% ROS); 60% Mathematics (52.9% city/79.3% ROS): 45% Global Studies (38.3% city/66.4% ROS); 45% U.S. History and Government (57.5% city/80.9% ROS)

H.S. 2200

Placed on list 1989 to 1992
Student Poverty Rate: 76%
Students with limited English: 21%
Improved in 7 out of 9 Measures

The new principal, on his first week on the job at this large high school serving primarily a Caribbean community, was informed that the school had been placed on the SURR list because of its high drop out rate. Prior to his arrival, there had been five principals in 4 years, some of whom quit and others of whom were removed. It was known as a "training building," used to prepare assistant principals for assignments to other large, troubled high schools. H.S. 2200 had been ignored for decades, "a dumping ground for students that no one wanted, teachers that no one wanted, and administrators that no one wanted." EPP's Monitoring Committee interviewed the principal, an assistant principal for guidance, and an assistant principal for instruction. The A.P. for instruction had been at the school for 25 years, so she described the school when she started: "It was a school where

the staff let it be known that the students were not to be given textbooks. I was told that 'it wasn't done here.' At times, there were more students in the hallways than in class and kids came into the class only when they felt like it. The school was disrespected by the students, and the students were disrespected. It was a vicious cycle that just kept getting worse by degrees every five years." Other problems cited were the lack of relationship of the school to the community and low staff morale over many years. The school had been built as a girl's high school. When the new principal came in, he found it in disrepair and "a disgrace, no urinals and no proper gym." Today, one third of the school is under remodeling and the temporary gym is full sized and well equipped.

Asked about what turned the school around, the interviewees said frankly that the planning team developed unified goals because they wanted the school to get off the SURR list. Everyone in the school began to stress attendance with students, and teachers began paying attention to evaluating what each student needed in terms of building academic skills and then developing a program for him or her. Another joint effort was to "keep the right kids." The principal explained, "When we see that a good student might want to transfer out, we really work with the parents and the student to keep the student here because there are so few positive role models at H.S. 2200. That's why we stress the college scholarship program -- we've raised more than a million dollars to help kids get into college."

Another major factor credited with the school's improvement is that a quarter of the staff was let go, twenty four teachers and three A.P.'s. Their replacements were dynamic teachers and capable AP's with leadership skills. The team looked at math scores on Regents' Competency Tests and changed the whole schedule so that students get three days of math lab following their math class and in the third period a science course. The bottom quartile students got ten periods of academic math. "We went from "Mickey Mouse" math to real algebra and geometry. The principal is still vigilant about teacher and substitute teacher performance, and a week before the EPP interview he had asked that a teacher who had been showing cartoons in the social studies class be removed. Title I funds were used creatively to lower class size. The school atmosphere changed dramatically because the principal instituted an open door policy with continual meetings with assistant principals, teachers, and students. But the "open door" description is misleading, because the principal often is not in his office but instead just parks his chair in a hallway chosen at random and uses the time to do paperwork in between talks with students and staff.

The third major change was that the school linked up with an effective community-based organization with strong ties to the Caribbean community. This CBO got a van and went out looking for students who were marked absent. Three other CBO's have programs at the school. The fourteen percent drop out rate fell to eight percent and attendance increased. A Saturday high school was initiated that served students and one thousand community people. Unfortunately, the Saturday high school was discontinued for lack of funds by the time EPP members visited the school. H.S. 2200 still has an extensive after-school offerings, including a steel drum music class, largely staffed by AIDP (Attendance Improvement Drop Out Prevention) youth programs, but additional courses in math are also offered. It was discovered that providing food at programs and simultaneous translation in Haitian Creole improved attendance at parents' meetings. One hundred parents usually attend regular meetings, but at the most recent "college night' four hundred showed up.

The challenges for H.S. 2200 still remain enormous. The three interviewees agreed that the core of "bright kids" was still small at the high school and that one feeder middle school, in particular, causes a problem. The A.P. for instruction said that she spent most of the fall trying to get students that had come from this intermediate school to understand that they could not roam the halls and instead had to stay in their classrooms. Yet, staff morale is high, largely because now "there is an acceptance that we have low-achieving students, but

we're also proud that after a few years we really improve their level of academic achievement, that make us all proud." A quarter of the students are recent immigrants. In the profile of the entering class, fifty five percent of the students are over age for their grade, their average daily attendance in their prior middle school spring semester was seventy eight percent, and only twenty percent test at or above the fiftieth percentile in reading and only ten percent test at this level in mathematics. Yet, by their fourth year in high school the percent of students meeting high school pass rates in mathematics exceeds the average for all high schools. But the stress on math performance has created an unanticipated problem for the principal who is concerned that reading scores are getting lower and the school will again be placed on the SURR list.

Though the relationship of the school to the community has changed dramatically, the school has a reputation for violence that is not easy to dispel. The staff interviewed stated that they felt they had been able to communicate to parents and students that once in the school, there was no violence. But they felt that the perimeter of the school was still threatening and a problem they could not solve. Nevertheless, the staff committees are still working hard and the entrepreneurial principal had established multiple joint programs with colleges and universities and large, prestigious companies that help to provide some of the scholarships that helps to motivate and reward their students. Currently, passing rates for the Regents Competency tests for HS 2200 students (followed by the averages for the city and the rest of the state) are: 83% Reading (84.7% city/93.9% ROS); 61% Writing (70.3% city/87.7% ROS); 44% Science (55.6% city/82.4% ROS); 35% Mathematics (52.9% city/79.3% ROS): 36% Global Studies (38.3% city/66.4% ROS); 56% U.S. History and Government (57.5% city/80.9% ROS)

APPENDIX 1

AN OVERVIEW OF EFFORTS TO IMPROVE LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK

Since 1985, low-performing schools in New York City have been the focus of a series of City and State Education Department improvement efforts. For the most part, these efforts have not been carefully studied, and their effectiveness appears to have been limited.

In December 1985, the New York State Education Department (SED) released its first list of schools identified as most in need of assistance, based on Comprehensive Assessment Report (CAR) data submitted by school districts to the State. The lowest-performing schools were identified on the basis of the proportions of their students meeting State-specified criteria in grades three through 12. In the elementary and middle schools, the criteria were based on student performance on State-mandated reading and mathematics tests. In the high schools, the criteria included the dropout rate, as well as performance on the Regents/RCTs in reading, writing, and mathematics. The State required the designated schools to improve student performance in the designated area by developing a comprehensive school improvement plan in consultation with school administrators, school staff, students, and parents.[1] Participation in the planning process was mandatory.

In 1985, the State identified 504 public schools as low-performing, or CAR schools. Of these, 393 were in New York City. To support the schools, the Board of Education established the Office of Comprehensive School Improvement Planning (OCSIP). OCSIP facilitators provided technical support, additional resources, and assistance in school wide planning.

School Improvement Under Fire. By 1988, dissatisfaction with the comprehensive school-improvement (CSIP) process was voiced in a study conducted for the Educational Priorities Panel (EPP) by Interface.[2] The study reported that only 201 of the 417 schools designated as CAR in New York City had received regular technical assistance from OCSIP. Overall, wide-scale improvement had not occurred.

The report identified problems which limited the program's impact. These included the limited implementation of school-improvement plans stemming from teacher shortages and a fundamental lack of basic resources, including funding for staff development, technical assistance, and adequate space. Because of the lack of resources, the EPP report called for more flexible use of categorical

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[1] New York State Board of Regents (1984) Regents Action Plan. Albany, New York, State University of New York.

Section 100.2 of the Commissioner's Regulations, cited in Educational Priorities Panel (1988) Appendix A.

[2] Interface (1988) Small change: The Comprehensive School Improvement Program. New York City: Educational Priorities Panel.

funds to address local needs. The study also noted a host of other local problems, some of which would resurface again and again. These included:

- The needs of limited English-proficient students were too often unmet.
- Rather than an integral part of school functioning, collaborative school-improvement efforts appeared to be a "peripheral add-on program, deprived of the opportunity to succeed in most schools."
- No one seemed to be responsible for the quality of a school's improvement plan or its implementation.
- School personnel felt a great deal of anger at what they saw as very stigmatizing process.

The report also noted that the criteria for placing a school on the list of low-performing schools did not take into account any of the problems faced by many of the schools, including student and staff mobility, poverty rates, or large numbers of limited English-proficient (LEP) students whose scores were included in the testing which was used to evaluate school performance.

Recommendations for Change. The EPP report offered a number of recommendations for change on the State and City level to address the problems identified. These included recommendations for changes in the funding formulas for state aid to education, and provisions for creating a Building Authority to renovate existing schools or build new ones. The report also recommended that:

- All schools should undertake a formal school-based planning and improvement process to make the SURR identification less stigmatizing for low-performing schools.
- More comprehensive, ongoing training should be offered for all participants in the planning process, including facilitators, principals, teachers, and parents.
- The legal mandates to serve the needs of LEP students should be met.
- Additional technical assistance should be provided to schools unable to establish an acceptable improvement plan or failing to improve.
- Clear consequences should be spelled out for schools unable to improve following the provision of additional assistance.
- Categorical funding constraints should be waived for schools with CSIP planning committees.

Many of these recommendations were addressed in subsequent Board of Education efforts to encourage improvement in the City's low-performing schools.

Recent Improvement Efforts

In 1989, the CAR/CSIP identification process was folded into the State's **Educational Accountability Project**, which subjected all New York's schools to registration review based on performance in relation to specific state standards. While the CAR process had identified **all** low-performing schools, the Registration Review process focussed on a smaller and hopefully more manageable number of very needy schools with low **and declining** performance on State standards. As intended, this resulted in a smaller number of schools being identified as in need of improvement, but possibly even greater stigmatization of the schools identified.

As in 1985, schools identified as under registration review (SURR) were to be provided with intensive technical assistance by SED in developing school improvement plans and undertaking associated staff and curriculum development efforts. In fall 1989, 39 New York City public schools were identified as SURR. By spring 1993, a total of 67 schools had been identified.

The Board of Education's Role

Since 1989-90, both City and State have continued to focus attention and resources on improving low-performing schools. In 1990, the Board of Education recommended the use of additional criteria to identify SURR schools. These included:

- the use of additional information on instructional effectiveness and a report from a site visit by a New York City review team prior to identification; and

- using both the State EAP standards and the Chancellor's Minimum Standards to identify schools.

The Chancellor's Minimum Standards went beyond the State's criteria to include measures of student progress (growth) in reading and math, as well as LEP students' progress in acquiring English (see Tables 1-A, 1-B and 1-C for statements of the State and the Chancellor's Minimum Standards). The State approved the proposal beginning in the 1990-91 school year.

At about the same time, the Fernandez administration pressed schools with high proportions of low-income students to apply for federal Chapter I school wide projects. This allowed the schools to use their monies more flexibly, and make more of the funding available for use at the school level. The Federal Chapter I application process also required schools to engage in school-based management/shared decision making (SBM/SDM) -- a collaborative planning process, involving teachers and parents in setting the school budget, hiring personnel, and developing improvement plans.

Additional Chapter I and private foundation grants were also secured to provide staff development for 230 schools which opted to participate in a process of school-based management

and shared decision making (SBM/SDM), and to hire project management for the Board of Education's central office. Additional funding for bilingual/ESL and mathematics remediation programs was aimed at improving the academic performance of limited English-proficient students. The overall focus was on increasing resources and encouraging innovation, collaboration, and planning at the school site. Some low-performing schools chose to join the process, although this initiative was not specifically targeted to them.

Table 1-A State EAP Standards for Elementary and Middle Schools
Grade 3 Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Reading: at least 65 percent of the students score at or above the State Reference Point on the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP).
Grade 6 PEP Reading: at least 65 percent of the students score at or above the State Reference Point (SRP) on the DRP.
Grade 8 PCT Reading: at least 75 percent of the students score at or above the State Reference Point (SRP) on the DRP.
Grade 3 PEP Mathematics: at least 75 percent of the students score at or above the State Reference Point (SRP) on the PEP Mathematics Test.
Grade 6 PEP Mathematics: at least 70 percent of the students score at or above the State Reference Point (SRP) on the PEP Mathematics Test.
Grade 9 Regents Competency Test (RCT) in Mathematics: at least 70 percent of the students on register in grade 9, as of March 31, pass either the RCT, Regents, or another approved test in mathematics.

Table 1-B Additional Elementary and Middle School Chancellor's Minimum Standards
Reading Progress (Quartile 1): in elementary schools, at least 70 percent of the students (general education and resource room students only) scoring in the lowest quartile in the previous year make gains of 10 or more DRP units. In middle schools, the standard is 60 percent of the students in the lowest quartile make gains of 7 or more DRP units.
Reading Progress (Quartiles 2 and 3, combined): in elementary schools, at least 60 percent of the students (general education and resource room students only) scoring in either quartile 2 or 3 in the previous year make gains of 7 or more DRP units. In middle schools, the standard is 60 percent of the students in quartiles 2 and 3, combined, make gains of 3 or more DRP units.
Reading Progress (Quartile 4): in elementary schools, at least 60 percent of the students (general education and resource room students only) scoring in the highest quartile in the previous year make gains of 3 or more DRP units. In middle schools, the standard is 60 percent of the students in the highest quartile make gains of 2 or more DRP units.
English-Language Acquisition Progress: In elementary schools, at least 60 percent of all Limited English Proficient (LEP)-eligible students make gains of 5 or more NCE's (Normal Curve Equivalents) on the Language Assessment Battery (LAB) or test out of LEP entitlement. In middle schools, the standard is 60 percent make gains of 4 or more NCE's.
Attendance: in elementary schools, an average daily attendance rate of at least 90 percent. In middle schools, an average daily attendance of at least 85 percent.

Table 1-C High School State EAP Standards
Reading: 80 percent of the 11th graders on register as of March 31 have passed either the RCT, or the Regents, or another approved test; and 90 percent of the 12th graders on register as of March 31 have passed either the RCT, or the Regents, or another approved test. Both parts must be met in order to pass the standard.
Writing: 70 percent of the 11th graders on register as of March 31 have passed either the RCT, or the Regents, or another approved test; and 90 percent of the 12th graders on register as of March 31 have passed either the RCT, or the Regents, or another approved test. Both parts must be met in order to pass the standard.
Mathematics: 70 percent of the 10th graders on register as of March 31 have passed either the RCT, or the Regents, or another approved test; and 90 percent of the 12th graders on register as of March 31 have passed either the RCT, or the Regents, or another approved test. Both parts must be met in order to pass the standard.
The **Annual Dropout Rate** is no higher than 10 percent.
Additional High School Chancellor's Minimum Standards
Reading Progress: at least 60 percent of the students (general education and resource room students only) scoring in the lowest quartile in the previous year make gains of 5 or more DRP units.[3] Note: additional reading progress standards for the high schools were not establishsed because of the ceiling on test performance above grade 8 for average and high-scoring students.
LAB Progress: at least 60 percent of all LEP-eligible students make gains of 3 or more NCE's on the LAB or test out of LEP entitlement.
Attendance: average daily attendance is at least 85 percent, and no more thanfive percent of the students are Long-Term Absentees (LTA's), and no more than 20 percent of all students are absent for 16 or more days in a semester. In order to meet the attendance standard, a school must meet all three parts of the standard

[3] This standard is applicable to schools with 20 or more students in the bottom quartile, or with 20 or more LEP-eligible students. This criterion is applicable to this and the following standard

State Education Department Efforts

Since early 1993, the State Education Department has taken a number of steps to focus attention and resources on low-performing schools. The first action was its Plan of Action for Low-Performing Schools, issued in February. This included plans for legislative and budgetary proposals, policy statements, regulatory changes, program assistance, and shared initiatives with other agencies. A variety of supports were offered, including intensive technical assistance and on-site training by State personnel. By March, all SURR schools were reported to have been included in the Chapter I Program Improvement initiative,[4] and could opt to participate in an innovative reform model. These included the Community Schools Program, the Comer School Development Model, Accelerated Schools, and the Two-Way Bilingual Education program. According to the report, grants had been made available for schools to develop improvement plans, and to support program activities after the planning period. State funds also supported training for parents, as well as staff development (including five Consortia for Leadership Development, in which community and high school districts collaborated with local colleges to provide training for administrators in low-performing schools).

In June 1993, the Regents appointed an Advisory Council to serve the Regents' Subcommittee on Low Performing Schools. The Council was headed by Regent Sanford and was made up of a diverse group of 35 individuals representing parents, educators, advocates, unions, corporations, and government. Early in 1994, the Council prepared a draft report presenting over 60 recommendations in support of improvement in low-performing schools.

By mid-1994, both the City and the State had developed new comprehensive plans to improve performance in low-performing schools. In June, the Board of Education under Chancellor Cortines submitted the City's plan for improving educational performance in 100 schools -- 55 identified as SURR and additional 45 identified under the Chancellor's Criteria. These schools were to be provided with a variety of supports targeted to their level and type of need, including comprehensive planning, technical assistance, staff development, university/corporate partnerships, and effective approaches to serve the unmet needs of special populations (e.g., special education, gifted and talented, and LEP students). Incentives to improvement were to be provided, and sanctions applied where improvement did not occur. Implementation of the plans was scheduled for the 1994-95 school year.

In fall 1994, the State Education Department issued its new and comprehensive "Plan of Action to Implement the Recommendations of the Report of the Regents Subcommittee on Low-Performing Schools Advisory Council." The plan targeted specific types of legislative and regulatory actions to be taken, including reallocation of resources in a "systemic effort to ensure that every SURR school has sufficient qualified staff, effective leadership and instructional programs, essential support services, and appropriate levels of parent and community involvement" (page 2). The Action Plan acknowledged that additional resources would be needed to address the "savage inequalities" persisting in the support provided to students in the State. Ironically, the modest amount of funding

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[4] Arthur L. Walton (March, 1993). Item For Discussion submitted to the Members of the Board of Regents: "Report on Schools Under Registration Review in New York City." Albany: State Education Department.

for school improvement efforts ($1 million) was almost completely eliminated from the budget in spring 1995.

APPENDIX 2

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

This appendix presents a closer look at certain aspects of the study methodology. It includes materials describing the content of the surveys and how the school improvement was defined and measured for the purposes of this study.

Survey Content

The survey asked the interviewees to describe the major problems facing the school at the time it was placed on the SURR list, and the changes that led to school improvement. The interviewees were also asked to review a list of school-improvement areas and indicate the importance of each. These included school leadership, staffing, management and planning, curriculum and instruction, scheduling, parent involvement, staff development, school climate/expectations, resources, and the student population. The interviewees were also asked to describe the people who helped the school make progress, as well as the activities and resources which were most helpful. Finally, the survey asked what lessons other low-performing schools could learn from the SURR experience. The interview data were content analyzed following a "debriefing" session with the EPP team.

Measures of School Improvement

All the schools had been removed from the SURR list because they had demonstrated improved performance in the area in which they had been cited. Most commonly, this was third-grade reading. However, since the criteria for removal from the SURR list were unclear in practice if not in principle, it was important to know whether the schools had in fact really improved, and whether improvement was visible only in the targeted area, or was in evidence across the curriculum.

To determine whether progress was real and general, multiple "before" and "after" measures of school performance and other indicators were compared. These included performance on State and well as City standardized tests, progress by LEP and low-achieving students, and other indicators such as dropout and attendance rates.

Data for the school year prior to the SURR designation were used as the baseline, since these were the data which were used to make the decision to cite the school. Eight of the 10 schools were named to the list in fall 1989, so their baseline year was 1988-89. Two of the schools were cited in spring 1991, so their baseline data came from 1989-90.

For the "after" or comparison year, we chose the year **prior** to that in which the school was actually removed from the list, since this was the information used to make the decision. Thus, if a school was removed from the list in December 1994, the "after" data came from the 1993-94 school year.

Ten schools were included in the analysis[1]. For the elementary schools, the data included outcome data for grades 3 and 6 reading and mathematics, grade 4 science, grade 5 writing, and grade 6 social studies (if the school had a sixth grade). For the middle/junior high schools, the outcomes included grade 6 reading, math, and social studies (if the school had a sixth grade), as well as the Preliminary Competency Test (PCT) results in reading and writing.[2] In the high schools, performance on the Regents/RCTs in reading, writing, and mathematics were included, as well as dropouts and the percentage of students graduating with a regents diploma. For all the schools, we also collected school-wide attendance, the progress of LEP students in acquiring English-language skills, and progress made by low-scoring students on the Degrees of Reading Power (the DRP). These students were defined on the basis of having scored in the first quartile (Q1) of the DRP in the spring of the previous year.

Complete School Profile data for 1989-90 through 1993-94 were provided by the New York City Board of Education. Data for 1988-89 were unavailable from the Board, and so had to be obtained from the CAR reports generated by the State Education Department.

The "before" and "after" data were tabulated for each school. Gains/losses were then calculated for each school on each performance measure. For each school, only a ratio of gains to losses was calculated, since most performance areas had different scales of measurement and could not be summed together. This procedure allowed us to create a rough measure of the degree of improvement, and to determine whether improvement in student performance was limited to one academic area or had occurred across the curriculum. The gains/losses in each performance area were also totalled across all the schools to compute an overall average gain for each performance measure. This allowed us to examine the areas of greatest and least improvement across all the schools.

Cautions

A number of cautions must be kept in mind when interpreting the outcome data. The State's CAR data did not include all the information reported in New York City's School Profiles, so some of the 1988-89 baseline data were missing for nine of the schools. This included English-language acquisition for LEP students, and low-scoring students' reading progress on the DRP. Information for the following year (1989-90) was therefore used as the baseline in these two areas. This information may have been different from the 1988-89 data.

In any given year, there were minor inconsistencies between the outcomes and reported in the State Education Department's CAR data and those reported by the Board of Education in the School Profiles. To this degree, some pre- and post-measures may not be exactly comparable since they may

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[1] The restructured schools were omitted, as well as the school which was failing at the time of the study.

[2] New York City Mathematics Test performance was not included for the elementary or middle schools because the test was changed during the study period, making "year-on" and "year-off" comparisons difficult to interpret.

not have been calculated with numbers generated in precisely the same way. The available records did not always report the numbers of students tested, which made it impossible to weight the overall outcomes, and the numbers were not always consistent when available.

For two schools, the actual degree of improvement could not be accurately measured from the School Profile data, because each shared a building with one or more other mini-schools. The School Profile was generated for the entire building, and therefore included the outcomes for all the students, and not just those in the targeted mini-school. These schools are the mini-schools at IS 160 and JHS 200. Because the outcomes for the targeted mini-schools are combined with those for other students, it is difficult to determine from the available data the basis on which the mini-schools were placed on the SURR list, and then were removed. If the Board of Education generates profiles for the mini-schools, as has been suggested, the information will be helpful in determining the extent of their progress with greater accuracy.

APPENDIX 3

DETAILS OF SCHOOL SETTINGS AND CHARACTERISTICS

School Characteristics

Table 3-A presents a reference summary of demographic characteristics for the schools included in this study. This information was taken from the fall 1994 School Profiles. For each school, the table presents:

- the percentage of resource room students and students in self-contained special education classes,
- the three-year stability rate,
- the number of students in temporary housing, and
- the racial/ethnic breakdown of the student population.

In addition, below the name of each school are two codes, as follows:

- T = Title/Chapter I school; N = not Title/Chapter I.
- P = the school reported many collaborative, externally funded programs.

  If the school reported only two or three programs, the number of programs appears in the table where the "P" would be. For example, there were only three collaborative programs reported in the Profile for PS 1500. Perhaps by mistake, there were no collaborative programs reported for PS 400.

Student Populations

Ethnic Composition. Like most of New York's public schools, all these schools served predominantly black and Hispanic students. In eight schools, black or Hispanic students made up 93 to 100 percent of the school population. Two of the 10 schools had student populations that included 15 to 17 percent white or Asian students. Black students comprised the largest racial/ethnic group in five of the 10 schools; Hispanics comprised the largest group in the other five.

During the time these schools were on the SURR list, three experienced some changes in the proportions of racial/ethnic groups in the school.[1] None of these changes appear to have been dramatic enough to have had an impact on student performance.

Poverty. The Board of Education's School Profiles provide a "poverty index" for each school. This index was used to determine whether the school was eligible for Chapter I funding. For any

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[1] The proportion of Blacks increased at PS 560, while that of Hispanics decreased. At PS 450, the proportion of Hispanics increased and Blacks decreased. At PS 1600, the proportion of Asians and Blacks increased slightly, while the proportions of the other ethnic groups decreased by a marginal amount. No dramatic changes were in evidence.

TABLE 3-A
CHARACTERISTICS OF FORMER SURR SCHOOLS

School	% Free Lunch	% LEP	% Re-source Room	% Special Ed.	3-Yr. Stability %	N of Studs. In Temp. Housing	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian (A), & White (W)
PS 500 T, P	97	14	11	10	77	3	82	18	--
IS 160 T, 2	59	3	43	3	65	1	44	50	2A, 3W
PS 1500 T, 3	95	53	2	2	71	0.00	5	93	1A, 1W
PS 560 T, P	95	26	3	16	60	50	53	46	--
PS 450 T, 3	94	35	4	0.00	67	0.00	14	85	1A
PS 1600 T, P	86	41	3	0.00	62	0.00	5	78	13A, 3W
JHS 200 T, P	98	3	6	11	85	2	41	58	1A
PS 400 N, ?	60	5	3	12	44	0.00	93	5	1A, 1W
HS 1700 N, P	37	3	8	10	92	1	62	22	12W, 3A
HS 2200 T, P	51	15	3	7	65	3	94	6	--

given school, it was the higher of two measurements -- either the total number of free-lunch forms submitted to the school, or the total number of children living in the attendance area who were assisted by public welfare programs, divided by the October 31 active pupil register for the school. Again, the proportion of low-income students varied widely, from 37 to 98 percent. Six schools reported very high poverty rates -- from 86 to 98 percent. Three schools reported a poverty index from 51 to 60 percent. Only HS 1700 reported a low poverty index of 37 percent free lunch-eligible students.[2]

Percentage of Limited English-Proficient (LEP) Students. There was a good deal of variation among the schools in the proportion of LEP students served -- from 3 to 53 percent. Four schools reported relatively few LEP students -- from about 3 to 5 percent of the total student population. Two schools reported LEP populations in the middle range of 14 to 15 percent. Four elementary schools reported high proportions of LEP students (21 to 53 percent). These schools' performance was most likely affected in third grade, when LEP youngsters are first included in the State tests which serve as criteria for the SURR designation. For these schools, the data on the ESL progress of LEP students is especially significant. (See Appendix 4 for a discussion of their performance.)

Percent of Special Education Students. In most of the schools, the proportions of special education students in resource rooms and self-contained classrooms was small, but it was notably large in several of the schools. The proportion of resource room students varied from a low of two at PS 1500 to a high of 43 percent at IS 160, which reported serving 60 resource room students out of a total student body of approximately 160. Five of the 10 schools served from about 2 to 4 percent resource room students; three schools served from about 6 to 11 percent.

The proportion of students in self-contained special education classes ranged from zero to three percent in four schools; five schools reported from seven to 12 percent of their total population as students in self-contained classes. One school reported relatively high proportions of these students (16 percent at PS 560).

If we examine the proportions of the students in resource rooms and self-contained special education classes taken together, we again see great variation across the schools. One group of three schools served only 3 to 4 percent special education students (resource rooms and self-contained classes, combined). These were PS 1500, PS 450, and PS 1600. A "middle group" of five schools served from 15 to 18 percent special education students. Two schools served more than 20 percent special education students -- PS 500 and IS 160.

Three-Year Stability Rates. The School Profiles include a three-year stability rate as an indicator of how long students are likely to remain in a school, thereby having the opportunity to benefit from continuity in instruction. This statistic represents the proportion of students in a school who were on register in that same school for at least three years (including the current year). Again, the schools varied widely, with stability rates ranging from 44 percent at PS 400 to 92 percent at HS

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[2] It is not unusual for high schools to report relatively low percentages of poor students because older students frequently do not return to school the Federal forms required to document their family income.

1700. PS 400 had the lowest stability rates (44 percent). Five schools fell in the middle range of 60 to 67 percent, while another five reported stability rates ranging from 71 to 92 percent.

Students in Temporary Housing. Very few of the schools reported serving any students at all in temporary housing. PS 560 was the only school to report serving 50 students, or 10 percent of the school population, but school staff indicated that these students were fully integrated into the instructional program.

School Leadership. As might be expected, the history of leadership in these schools varied. Some schools had languished under one ineffective principal for years as conditions worsened. Other schools had experienced 'revolving door' leadership with as many as four principals in as many years. Of the current principals, one had been in the school for 29 years and another for 20, but not as principal. Several were selected to be principal of the school just as the school was designated as SURR, meaning that they were expected to turn the school around. Two had been principals of their school for only three years.

APPENDIX 4

PATTERNS OF PROGRESS IN SCHOOL OUTCOMES

ANALYSIS

In each school, differences were calculated between the baseline and final year for each performance measure, using whatever metric had been reported in the CAR report or School Profile. These were usually the percentages of students meeting each criterion, or attendance and dropout percentages. On each measure, the "score" could be an improvement, a decline, or no change in performance.

For each school, the areas of improvement were calculated as a proportion of all the areas measured. This simple procedure allowed us to create a rough measure of **the extent of improvement in each school**, and to determine whether improvement in student performance was limited to one academic area or had occurred across the curriculum. A score of "no change" was included along with the **decreases** in calculating the proportion of improved measures. The differences (improvements/declines) were also totaled to compute an **overall average improvement/decline for each performance measure** (for example, the grade 3 Pupil Evaluation Program or PEP test in math). This allowed us to examine the areas of greatest and least improvement across all the schools.

It should also be noted that if a school did not improve on a particular measure, this does not imply that performance on that measure was low; it may not have been. However, this study chose to focus on improvement because so many of the pre-SURR indicators were in fact low.

Some Points to Remember

The data tables in this appendix do not, for example, present the **actual percentages** of students passing the SRP on the PEP Grade 3 Reading test in the baseline year and the year off. They present only the **differences** between the two measures. In addition, on all three tables, the area (or areas) in which the school was cited are marked with a footnote.

FINDINGS

The Elementary Schools

For the elementary schools and the K-8 school, Table 4-A presents the degree of improvement or decline in:

- The percentage of students scoring above the State Reference Point (SRP) on the Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Tests of reading and math in grades 3 and 6, and of writing in grade 5

- The average raw score on the content part of the Elementary Science Program Evaluation Test (ESPET) in grade 4

- The average total raw score on the grade 6 Program Evaluation Test (PET) in social studies.

Table 4-A also report the degree of improvement or decline in:

- The school-wide attendance rate.

- The percentage of students who scored in the first quartile (Q1) during the previous year who make gains of five or more DRP units of the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test.

- The proportions of LEP students who make gains of 3 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs) on the English Language Assessment Battery, or who test out of entitlement to bilingual/ESL services (when appropriate).

Improvement in the Elementary Schools

The bottom line on Table 4-A shows that, across the elementary schools, improvements were made on eight of the 10 measures reviewed. In three areas (PEP 3 reading, PEP 3 math, and PEP 6 math), the gains were particularly dramatic. In these three areas, the proportions of students meeting the State's competency criteria increased by more than 10 percentage points. All the elementary schools had been cited for performance on the PEP grade 3 reading test, and this was one of the three areas of greatest improvement. The PEP reading, math, and writing data are presented in Figure 1.

Across the elementary schools, most other performance areas also showed moderate improvement of one to 10 percentage points. These included performance on the grade 4 ESPET science test, the grade 6 PEP reading test, the grade 6 PET social studies test. (The PET data appear in Figure 2.) Performance on the grade 5 writing test was more variable. The data indicate large improvements in three schools, and large declines in two schools, for an overall decrease of 1.6 points in the percentage of students meeting the State minimum competency criterion. Across the elementary schools, attendance either remained constant over time, or improved. (Attendance data appear in Figure 3.)

The results for low-achieving (Q1) and LEP students were more variable. Overall, students in Q1 on the DRP made good progress at three schools, but lost ground at two others. Although the average gain for Q1 students was positive, their performance varied greatly from school to school. More disturbingly, at three out of the four elementary schools reporting data for LEP students, the proportion of students achieving the Chancellor's criterion for English-language acquisition fell, showing dramatic declines at two schools. This suggests that the emphasis on improving English reading achievement in grade 3 may have been achieved at the expense of bilingual/ESL services for LEP students. Evidence for this appears in the interview data, in which two principals indicated that they had eliminated special programs for LEP students

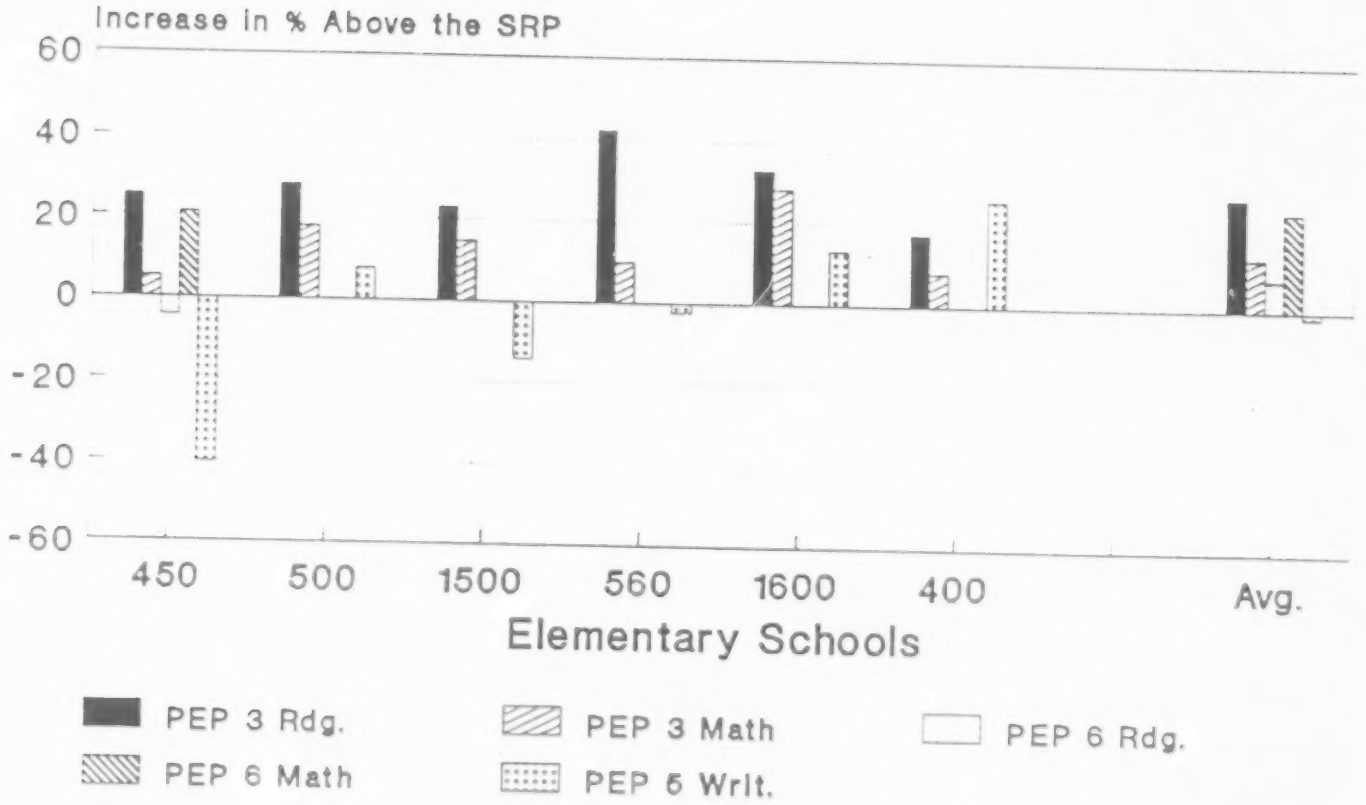
TABLE 4-A
AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS (1)

School	PEP 3 Reading (Incr. In % Above SRP)	PEP 3 Math (Incr. In % Above SRP)	PEP 6 Reading (Incr. In % Above SRP)	PEP 6 Math (Incr. In % Above SRP)	PEP 5 Writing (Incr. In % Above SRP)	ESPET 4 Science (Incr. In Avg. Raw Score, Content)	PET 6 Social Studies (Incr. In Avg. Total Raw Score)	%-point Improvement in Attendance	Q1 Progress (Increase in % Gaining 5 NCEs)	LEP Progress (Incr. in % Ogaining 3 NCEs)
PS 500	27.9 (2)	17.7	N.A.	N.A.	-13.9	4.9	N.A.	4.4	20.3	N.A.
PS 1500	23.0 (2)	14.6	N.A.	N.A.	-2.3	4.1	N.A.	-.8	-2.5	-7.7
PS 560	42.3 (2)	9.9	N.A.	N.A.	13.4	1.9	4.5	4.4	-10.5	-21.0
CS 450 (4)	25.3 (2)	5.1	-4.4	20.8	7.5	5.2	2.3	1.4	24.9	-10.1
PS 1600	32.8 (2)	28.3	N.A.	N.A.	26.0	3.0	N.A.	4.2	20.5	7.7
PS 400	17.6 (2)	8.3	23.7	43.7	93.1 (4)	4.5	2.7	-.2	-1.2	N.A.
Column Average (5)	27.5	12.6	7.6	24.0	-1.6	4.1	4.0	2.2	7.7	-10.4

Notes:

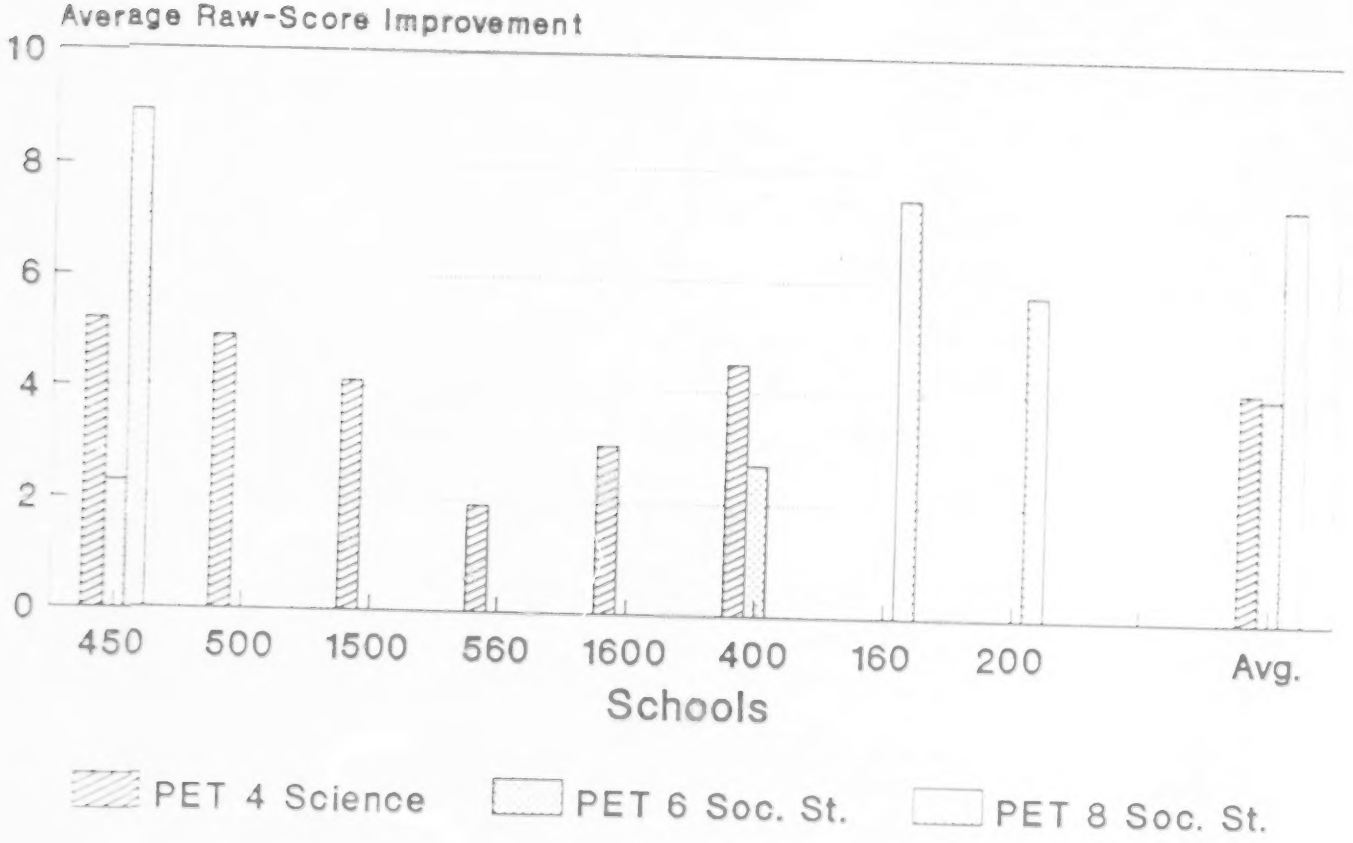
(1) Each cell presents the improvement between the baseline year and the "year off"
Differences of +/- 1 point were considered as no change.
(2) The area(s) in which the school was cited
(3) See the middle school table (Table 4-C) also
(4) Probably due to a reporting error in 1988-89. This value was not included in the column average.
(5) Unweighted average (insufficient data in the baseline year or the "year off")

Figure 1: PEP Reading and Math Changes in the % of Students Above the SRP, Grades 3 and 6



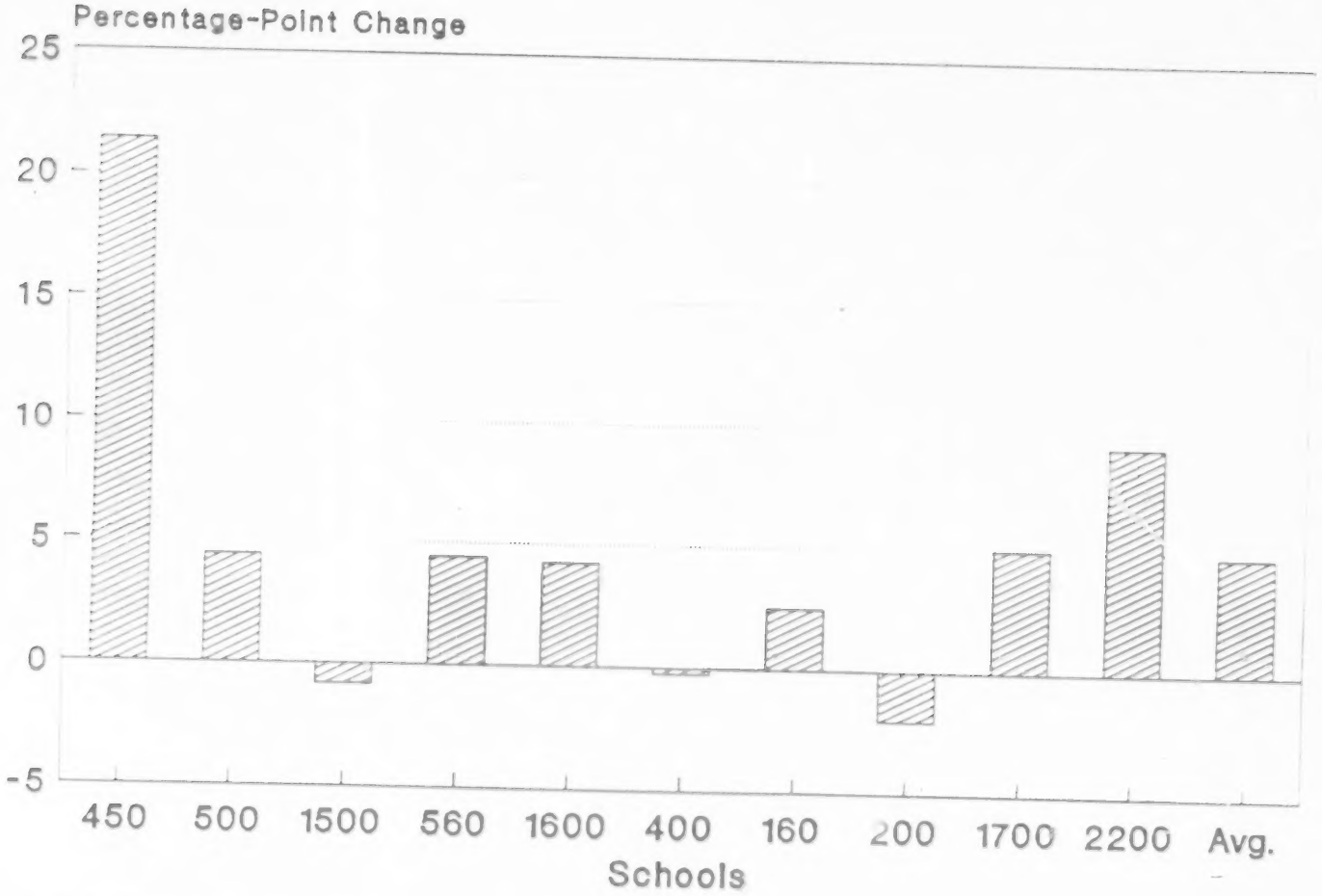
SRP = State Reference Point

Figure 2: Average Raw-Score Gains on the ESPET Grade 4 Science Test and the PET Social Studies Tests, Grades 6 & 8



ESPET: content subtest; PET: total score

Figure 3: Attendance Improvement in Former SURR Schools



All the schools are included.

to emphasize reading in English. The data for Q1 and LEP students appear in Figure 4.

Table 4-B presents the percentage of outcome areas showing improvement for each of the 10 schools reported. Four of the six elementary schools improved on 75% or more of the measures. Even the elementary school with the lowest improvement ratio still gained on three out of seven measures, or about 43 percent of its outcome measures. The data suggest that improvements were substantial and fairly general in the elementary schools.

TABLE 4-B
PERCENTAGE OF OUTCOME MEASURES SHOWING IMPROVEMENT
IN 10 FORMER SURR SCHOOLS

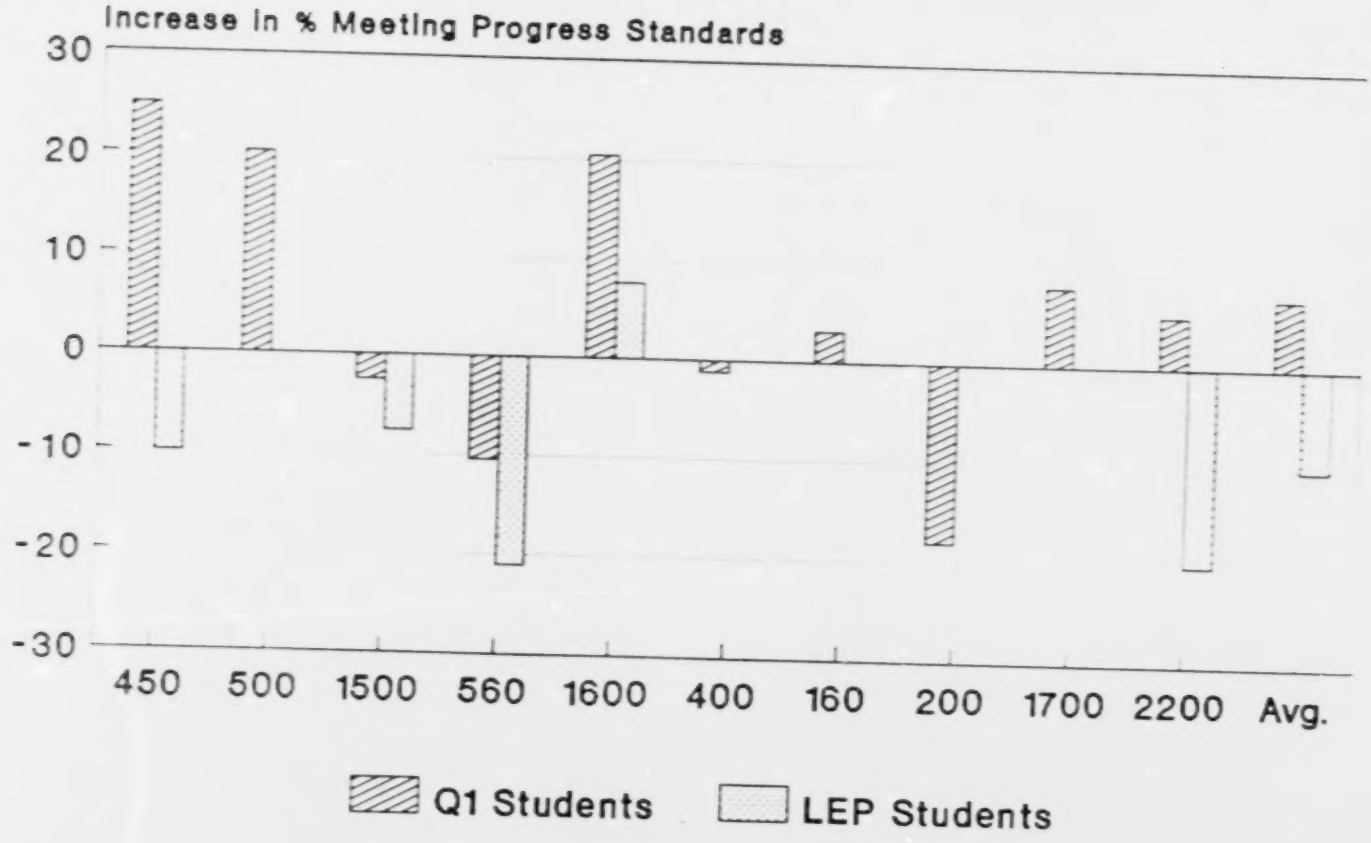
School	Percentage of Improved Measures
CS 450	9/13 = 69.2%
PS 500	5/6 = 83.3%
PS 1500	3/7 = 42.9%
PS 560	6/8 = 75.0%
PS 1600	7/7 = 100.0%
PS 400	7/9 = 77.8%
IS 160	6/6 = 100.0%
JHS 200	2/6 = 33.3%
HS 1700	6/9 = 66.6%
HS 2200	7/9 = 77.7%

Performance in the Middle Schools

For the middle schools, Table 4-C presents the degree of improvement or decline in:

- The percentage of students scoring above the State Reference Point (SRP) on the Pupil Evaluation Program (PEP) Tests of reading and math in grade 6 (when reported).
- The average total raw score on the grade 6 Program Evaluation Test (PET) in social studies (when reported)
- The percentage of students scoring above the State Reference Point (SRP) on the Preliminary Competency Tests (PCTs) in reading and writing in grade 8

Figure 4: Changes in the Percent of Q1 and LEP Students Meeting Progress Standards



First-Quartile (Q1) and LEP Students

- The percentage of students passing the Regents Competency Tests (RCT) in mathematics (when reported).
- The school-wide attendance rate.
- The percentage of students who scored in the first quartile (Q1) during the previous year who make gains of five or more DRP units of the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test.
- The proportions of LEP students who make gains of 3 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs) on the English Language Assessment Battery, or who test out of entitlement to bilingual/ESL services (when appropriate).

TABLE 4-C
AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOLS (1)

School	PCT-Rdg. (Increase in % Passing)	PCT-Writ. (Increase in % Passing)	PET -Soc. St. (Increase In Avg. Total Raw Score)	RCT Math Increase in % Passing)	%-Point Improvement in Attendance	Q1 Progress (Increase in the % Gaining 5 NCEs)	LEP progress (Increase in the % Gaining 3 NCEs)
IS 160 (2)	6.8	16.9	7.5	30.8 (3)	2.5	3.2	N.A.
JHS 200 (2)	-7.7	-20.2	5.8	4.5 (3)	-2.0	-18.1	N.A.
CS 450 (4)	-3.7	-11.5	8.9	N.A.	See elem. (5)	See elem. (5)	See elem. (5)
Column Avg. (6)	-1.5	-4.9	7.4	17.7	.3	-7.5	N.A.

Notes:

(1) Each cell presents the improvement between the baseline year and the "year off." Differences of +/- 1 point were considered as no change.
(2) These schools' statistics include students from other mini-schools in the same building.
(3) The area(s) in which the school was cited.
(4) See the elementary school table (Table 4-A) also.
(5) Because CS 450 serves mostly students in grades K-6, their data appear in the table with the other elementary schools. It would not be appropriate to compare CS 450 with the other middle schools.
(6) Unweighted average (insufficient data in baseline year and "year off").

Findings for the Middle/Intermediate Schools

There were two intermediate schools in the sample, as well as one community school (CS 450) serving students in grades 1-8. Because CS 450 serves primarily students at the elementary level, its outcomes for attendance, LEP progress, and progress for low-achieving students are included with the other elementary schools in Table 4-A. The performance of CS 450's 8th graders on the PCT reading and writing tests and the PET social studies test is reported with the other middle schools in Table 4-B. Figures 2 through 5 present these outcomes in graphic form.

IS 160 and JHS 200 were cited for RCT mathematics, the area in which they made the greatest progress. Performance also rose consistently in social studies at all three schools. Compared with the elementary schools, however, performance in the middle/intermediate schools was more mixed in the other areas reported. Performance on the PCTs in reading and writing was very variable, declining at two of the schools while they were on the "SURR" list. (See Figure 5 for PCT performance.)

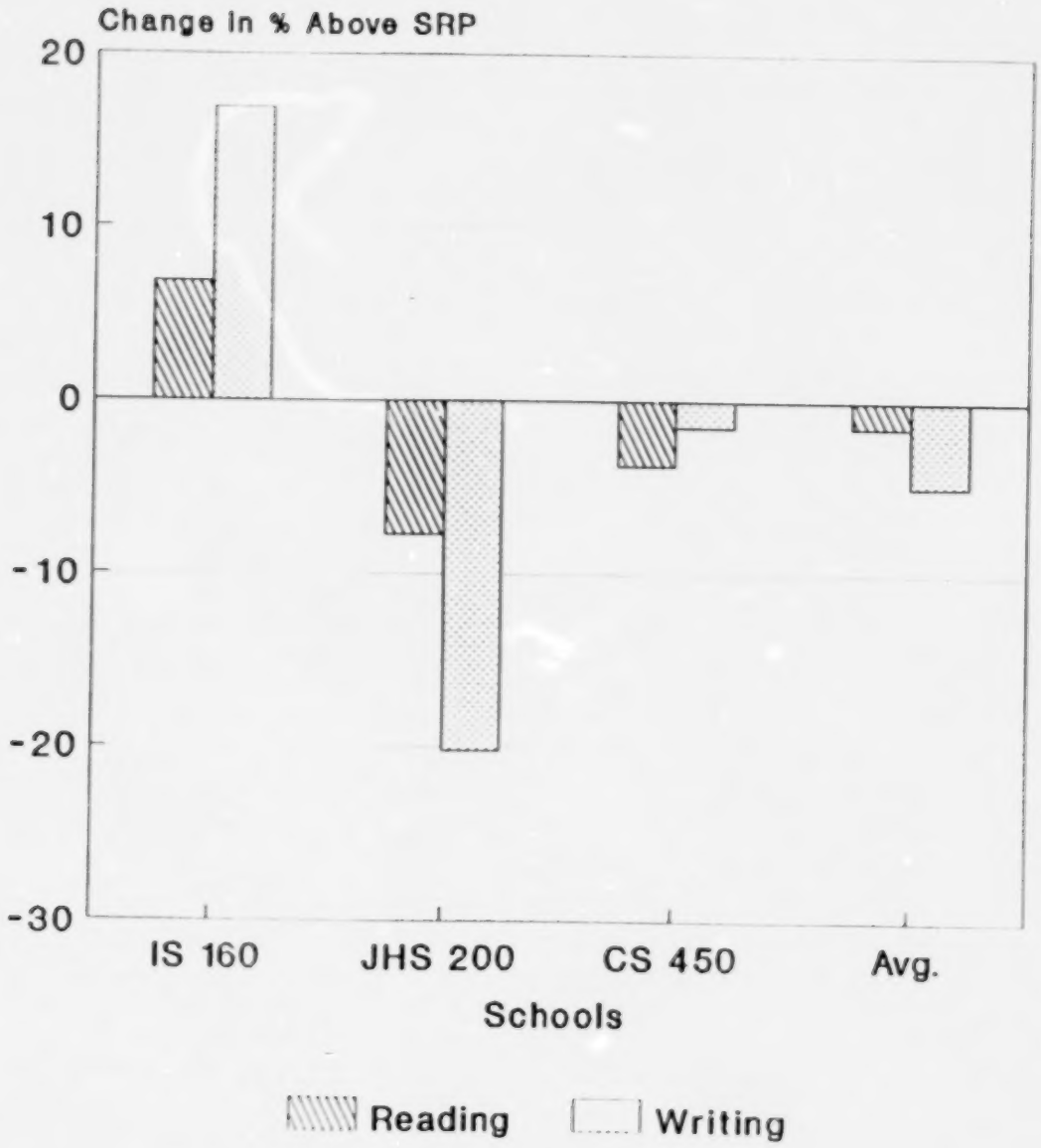
Overall improvement ratios for the middle schools are reported on Table 4-B, above. One middle school appeared to make progress in more areas than the others, but each improved in more areas than just the one for which it had been cited.

Performance in the High Schools

For the high schools, Table 4-D reports the degree of improvement or decline in:

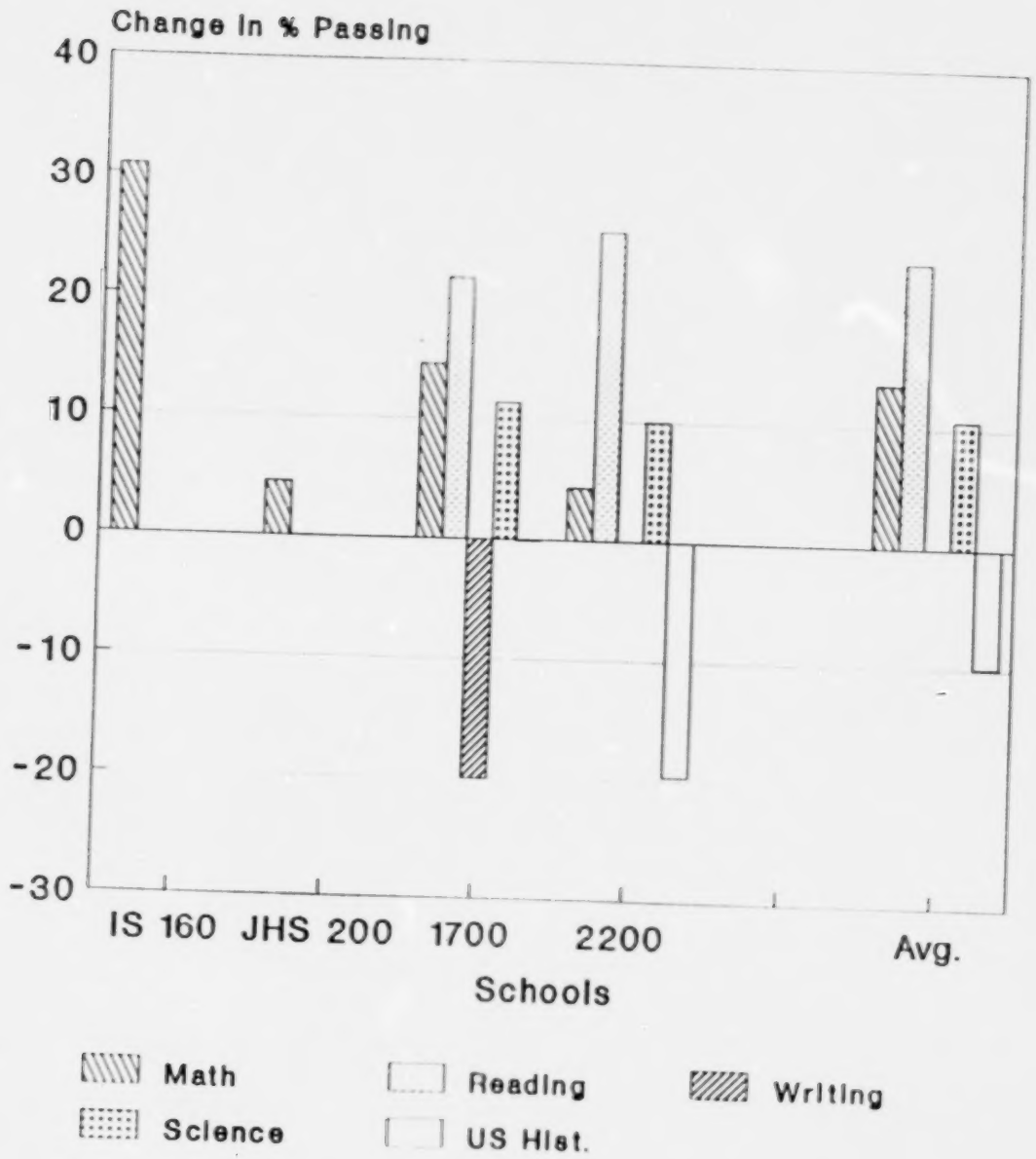
- The percentage of students passing the Regents Competency Tests (RCT) in reading, mathematics, science, writing, and US history.
- The percentage of students graduating with a Regents diploma.
- The school's dropout rate.
- The school-wide attendance rate.
- The percentage of students who scored in the first quartile (Q1) during the previous year who make gains of five or more DRP units of the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test.
- The proportions of LEP students who make gains of 3 Normal Curve Equivalents (NCEs) on the English Language Assessment Battery, or who test out of entitlement to bilingual/ESL services (when appropriate).

Figure 5: PCT Reading and Writing Tests Changes in the Percent of Students Above the SRP



SRP • State Reference Point

Figure 6: Changes in the Percent of Students Passing RCT Exams



RCT - Regents Competency Tests

TABLE 4-D
AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS (1)

School	RCT-Rdg (Incr. in % Passing)	RCT-Math (Incr. in % Passing)	RCT-Science (Incr. in % Passing)	RCT-US History (Incr. in % Passing)	RCT-Writing (Incr. in % Passing)	Incr. In % Getting a Regents Diploma	%-point Change in the Drop-out Rate (2)	%-point Improvement in Attendance	Q1 Progress (Incr. In % Gaining 5 NCEs)	LEP Progress (Incr. In % Gaining 3 NCEs)
HS 1700	21.8	14.6 (3)	11.4	-.1	-20.0 (3)	-1.2	-2.3	5.0 (3)	8.0	N.A.
HS 2200	25.8 (3)	4.4 (3)	10.0	-19.6	N.A.	2.0	-1.8 (3)	9.3	5.2	-20.0
Column Avg. (4)	23.8	9.5	10.7	-9.9	(5)	.4	-2.1	7.2	6.6	(5)

Notes:

(1) Each cell presents the improvement between the baseline year and the "year off." Differences of +/- 1 point were considered as no change.
(2) In this case, a negative change is a desirable outcome -- a reduction in the dropout rate.
(3) The area(s) in which the school was cited.
(4) Unweighted average (insufficient data in baseline year and "year off").
(5) No averages were calculated because of insufficient data.

Patterns of Improvement in the High Schools

The two high schools in the sample were cited in various areas. HS 1700 was cited for RCT performance in math and writing, as well as attendance. HS 2200 was cited for RCT performance in reading and math, and for its high dropout rate (see Table 4-D). The available data show that, except for the RCT in writing at HS 1700, the schools improved in all the areas in which they were cited. Both schools showed improvement on the reading, mathematics and science RCTs (see Figure 6). They also showed improvements in the progress of low-performing students on the DRP, as well as the school wide dropout and attendance rates. Performance varied more on the US history RCT, and again, the pattern of declining performance for LEP students was discouraging. Overall, however, both high schools showed improved performance in at least two-thirds of the measures reported (see Table 4-B, above).

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OVERALL FINDINGS

All the schools showed some improvement. Almost universally, the schools improved in the areas for which they had been cited. But beyond that, eight of the 10 schools improved in two-thirds or more of the measures included in the analysis. Across the schools, the data indicate that all schools demonstrated stronger performance, and that the improvements were often substantial.